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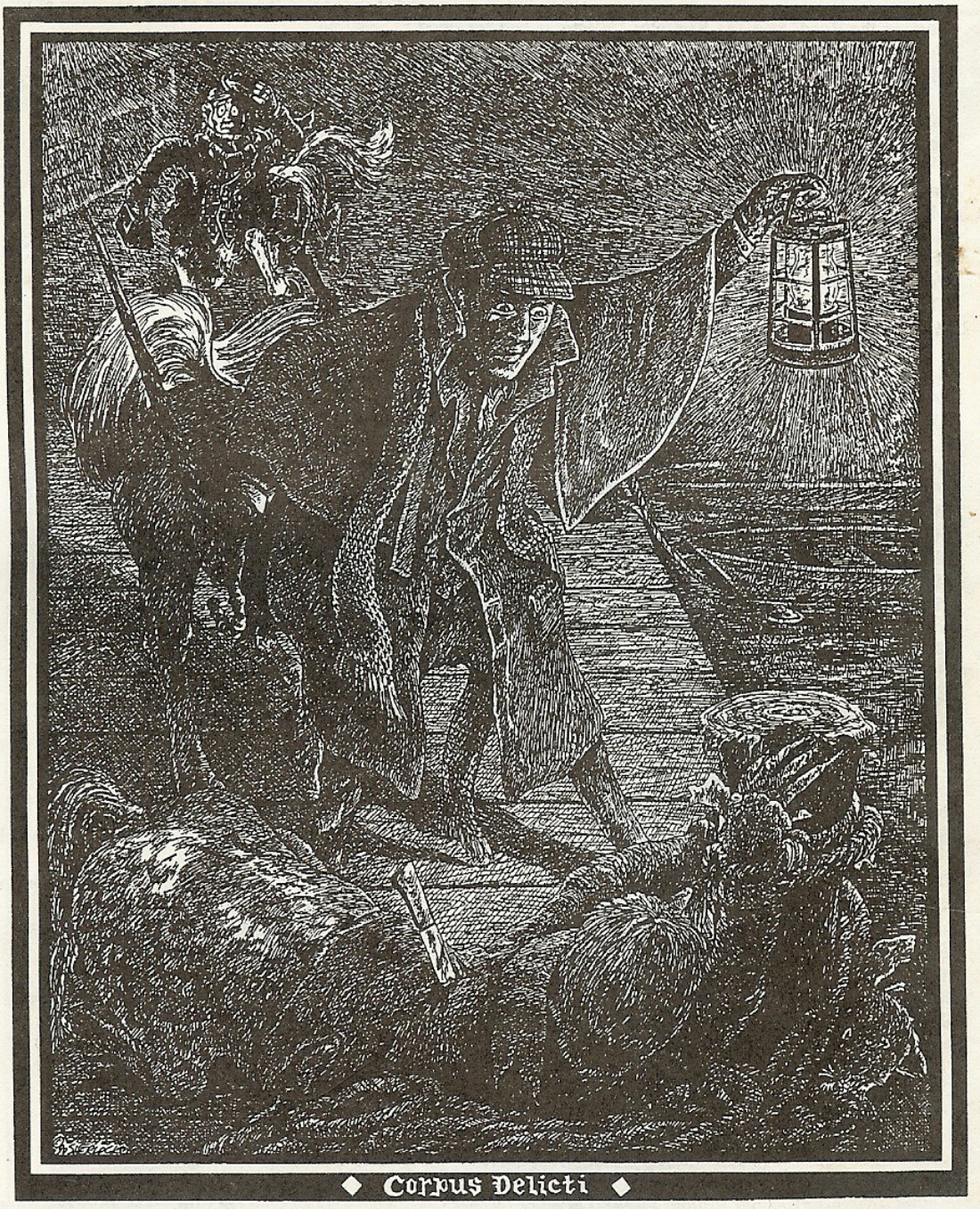

◆ Corpus Delicti ◆

CENTAURS GATHERUM

Issue Twenty-Five

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Editor Pro Tem, Victor Wren--116 1/2 North Wheeling, Tulsa, OK 74110

Issue 25 **Contents of Table** August

Cover "Corpus Delicti"▪Sherlock: "Soon I'm supposed to draw jillions of walrus for Central Colorado Library System. It's a living."

1 "Getting Away From it All"▪Jack Cavenaugh: "Usually X-rated doesn't do a thing for me, but at times it can be very fun to draw and it untangles the mind after a hard day at work."

2 "Fork in the Road"▪Karena Kliefoth: "Elastic is bad for dogs."

3 "Trapper"▪Terrie Smith: "Red Shetland #3 is out! See Ruggels ink my pencils—Interesting."

4 "Make me an A-10"▪Roy D. Pounds II: "Yeah! Tell me about how most creative people are weird!"

5,6 ☺☺☺ Simply the Second Special Systematic Centaur Survey Summary ☺☺☺

7 "Washing the Dog"▪Karena Kliefoth: "I've been involved in E-mail lately. Only way to keep up."

8 Brake▪Paula Schricker: "I can't really say that I'm into abstract board games. You could say that I have a tendency to get 'board.' Yuk, Yuk, Yuk."

9 Brake▪Heather Bruton:"Glad to hear people are talking about *Paper Phantasies*. Hope it's all been good."

10 "My Hero"▪Parsonavich: "I've come to the conclusion that I'm too uptight...I blame the atomic bomb."

11 "Kitty"▪Bill Fitts▪

12 Jaffó▪Victor Wren ☺ "The quality of mercy is not strained. You can tell by all the lumpy bits."

13 "Pandora"▪Michael Higgs: "I can make *quite* good oatmeal cookies."

14 "The Storyteller"▪Roy D. Pounds II: "Dragons, I guess, aren't as popular as they used to be."

15-22½ "The Cold From Beyond"▪Fiction by Rodford E. Smith: "You know, I expect a letter from Publisher's Clearinghouse any day, now."

22 "Sector Scan"▪Chris Grant: (We're desperately searching for Chris's letters—ack! Never split yer files!)

23 Riot Gear▪Scott Ruggels: "I don't need further embarrassment over my rather endemic (pandemic) typos."

24 "One Helluva Kick"▪Derryl L. Munro: "Boy, it seems like everyone wants a Sintarré to move in."

25 LL: Henri de Toulouse-Lataur▪Craig Hilton: "I really, really owe you another centaur pic."

25 UR: Grecian Plate▪Bob Stein: "How do they get the *!?@! brush to stay steady?"

26 "First Fretless"▪Victor Wren: "*Magic* is the art of turning the absurd into something captivating."

27 "We Went to the Movies..."▪Paige Easley: "This is going to be the messiest letter I've ever typed!"

28 "Hi, Rhudi!"▪Mary Lynn S. Johnson: "I know how much you dislike drawings without backgrounds."

29 "Welcome, Tom"▪Scott Ruggels: "Inking a comic book is a full-time job. Draw until my eyes bleed."

CANTER-FOLD: "Hitchhiker" ▪Kevin Hopkins: "At least you'll get a free ad."

32 "Happy Birthday, Spot!"▪Mary Lynn Skirvin Johnson: "She's a fellow skull collector."

33 Diapering Steinling▪Terrie Smith: "How's Indigo? Getting big? Recon she's stopped growing by now."

34 "Those Fearsome Frog Giggers"▪Quinton Hoover: "So, did Santa ho-ho-ho all over you?"

35-39 "Firefish"▪by David Rust:"Cthulhu in '92: *When You're Tired of Voting for the Lesser of Two Evils.*"

40 Rafe▪April Lee: "I have been doing a few originals on papyrus paper."

41 Diarmid▪April Lee:"I hope you are remembering to be as tactful as possible in your comments."

42 "Warlady"▪Sheryl A. Knowles: "I get strange enough looks when people learn I'm a computer artist and/or a paper doll artist! They don't *want* to hear about my dreams. ☺"

43 "Sidney Walleyroo"▪Jack Cavenaugh: "The best part is watching people's reaction."

44 "Krell's Brothers"▪Terrie Smith: "*Heroes* outline is coming along and starting to shape up."

45 "Sigg"▪David P. Cannon: "Not being a sun worshipper, I've taken to dashing from between shady trees and porches, much like our intrepid CIA guys."

46 UR"Four Musicians"▪Mary Lynn Skirvin Johnson: "I'll send you a tape of the pencil test once we get it working."

46 LL Big Bad Wolf▪Derryl L. Munro: "Four limbs or six, it's the feeling that counts."

47 Four Other Musicians▪Natasha Dahlberg: "What on Earth is Frozen Mayonnaise Concentrate?"

48 "Sealion Serenade"▪Mary LS Johnson: "Jim Groat AFRAID of chastisement???? I don't believe it."

49 Trevor▪Paula Schricker: "She's also a dead shot with a laser rifle."

50 Nicholai ▪Michelle Parker (Michelle was referred to us by Cat Henley. We hope to see

51 Alexander ▪Michelle Parker more of her excellent work in future issues.)

52 In the Woods ▪Peregrin: "You wait; Golden Retriever fur *will* turn up in your supper one of these days."

53 "The Last Show"▪Victor Wren: "I think clams are probably overrated."

54 "Who Left the Files Open?"▪Derryl L. Munro: "I *do* love to get mail."

55 "Beach Bumming"▪Joyce Norton: "I've got a kitten that enjoys chewing on illustration board..."

56 Rand; "Don't Grab My Horns"▪Frank Gembeck: "I *highly* recommend Heather's centaur calendar."

57 Rand; Night Dance▪Frank Gembeck: "Gotta support 'pretty boy' art, after all."

58 Genjiro▪Joyce Norton: "...It's not bad as long as there isn't anything drawn on the board."

59 Spotted Romance▪Heather Bruton: "Ack! Let's not discuss Canada's buying 'Voice of Fire.' I'll go off on another diatribe and get myself all worked up."

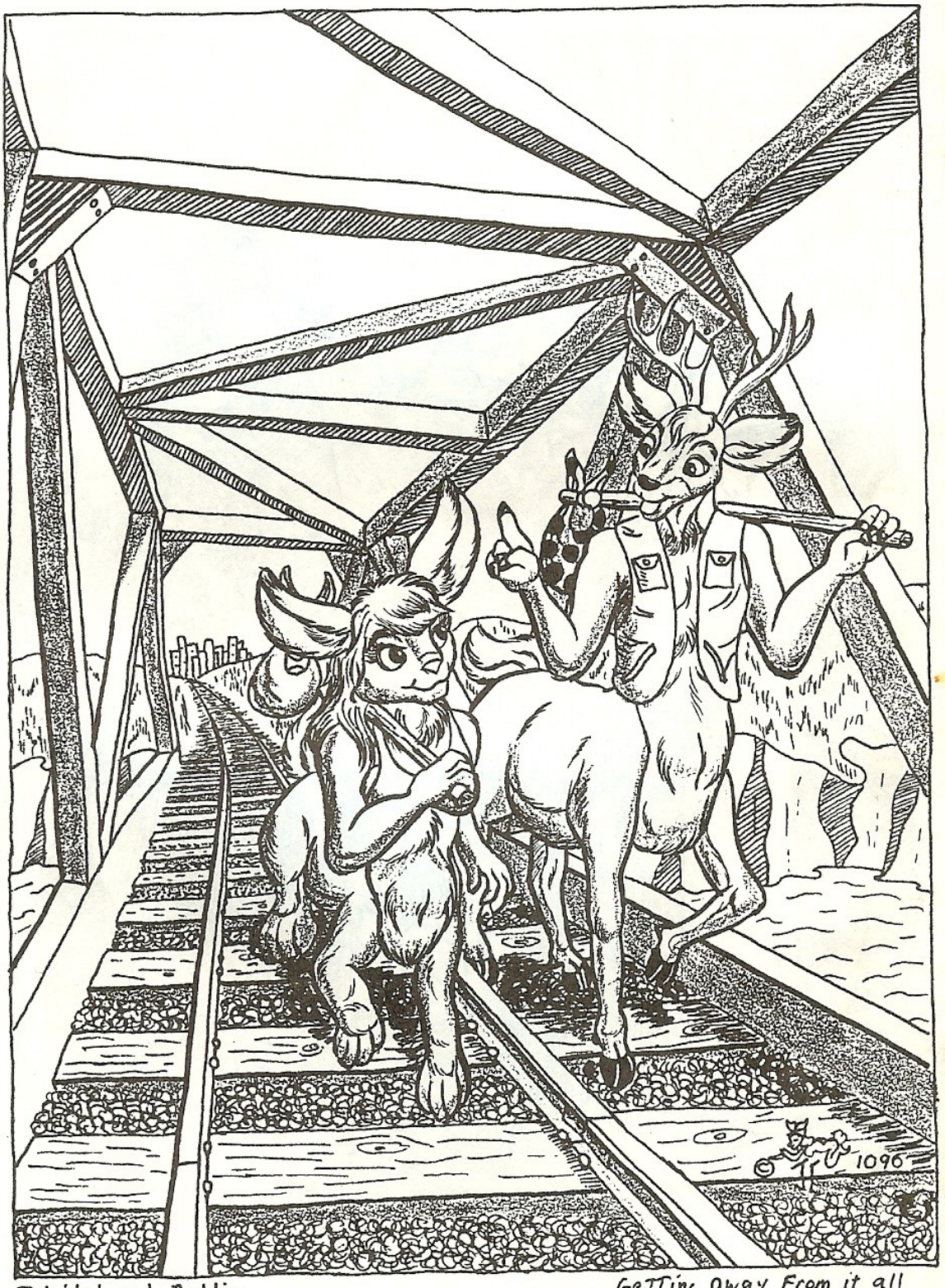
60 "Crow, Hunted"▪Paige Easley: "No question is dumb!"

IBC—Editorial (guilty)▪VTW and Edward Pegg. Ed: "Aren't you finished with the damned thing *yet??*"

Back Cover "John Henry"—Quinton Hoover: "Hey, that Sherlock piece you sent me a copy of was spiffy."

Hey gang! Learn to play the Colophon for fun and prophet! Issue #25 of *Centaurs Gatherum* is Copyright © by Ed Pegg Jr. Copyright of all art presented in these pages reverts after this single issue to the artists who created it. Subscriptions are $15 a year (postal rate hikes are hell on small press) except to artists who send usable art (whether or not it gets used--Ed and I haggle over this often). See this issue's editorial or write Ed for details. Characters and situations are intended to represent persons living or dead, but alas, genetic engineering isn't that good yet. Copies of back issues #1 - #11 are available for $1.00 each. Issues #12 - #24 are available for $2.00 each. Artwork is selected for publication by virtue of originality, effort and background. Oh, and SPACE!!! If all goes well, an Artists Guidelines should be available soon to interested parties and other small gatherings.

Jack Cavenaugh Quote, David Cannon-"One of these encapsulated wads of history (days) I'll actually do a story. That is, when I get my cranial rotary observational communicator screwed on straight."



Trinidad and Redding

Getting away From it all

Karena Kliefoth-"Thanks for the chocolates. We all enjoyed them. After Tanniver (*a resident vampire -vw*) went through and bit about half of them, Charlotte and I went through and squeezed the other half. We managed to find the ones with good filling that way."

Terrie Smith-"Work on 'Tomatoes' has begun. Hurrah that the MCL mechanical characters won't play too big a role in it. Marvel saw seven cuts and confirmed that it stunk. Hurrah!! We'll be animating it mostly *right*."

Roy D. Pounds II-"It's kinda' hard for me to decide what my 'dream car' is. They don't make anything like the rebel snow speeders from *Star Wars*, and it's kinda' hard to get a *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* U.F.O.. Besides, my driving habits would probably send the F.A.A. into fits! I wouldn't mind having a blimp."

The Questionnaire
USE THE BACK IF NECESSARY
1. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE REPRESENTED IN THE ADDRESS LIST? (EXAMPLE, A25 = ARTIST WHO DOES COMMISSION WORK FOR $25.00. ECT.)
2. WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR PHONE NUMBER TO BE PRINTED
HMMM... $25.00 SEEMS A BIT HIGH. I LIKE TO START AT $10.00.
HEY ED? WHEN YOU PUT ME ON YOUR LIST, COULD YOU MAKE ME AN A-10?
OKAY... IF YOU INSIST!
LET ME REPHRASE THAT!
©1990 R. Pounds II

Kevin Hopkins-"The Mostly Art Zine is a zine by artists for artists, art lovers and anyone who enjoys SF/F and new art. The zine should consist of about 80% B&W art. It should be a great place for B&W artists to display their work."

☺☺ The Official Unofficial CG Survey ☺☺

When I set out to compile the results of this survey, I figured it would just be a matter of making a list of the most popular responses and noting how many times each was selected. After pouring a vast pile of paper into the massive CG computer banks, I immediately noticed one thing: I'd have to be nuts to try and find a cohesive pattern in your responses! If you're hoping for a *USA Today* survey, with graphs and pie-charts and boldface type, forget it. This is going to be difficult to read, and I apologize, but it is in keeping with the nature of the beast that I present it in this somewhat more personal way.

Without a doubt, *CG* readers are some of the most diverse (and slightly unbalanced) group of people you could imagine. Ninety-two people responded, (which is better turnout than the presidential elections!) and no two did so quite the same. Some people took offense at the wording of the questions (most often stated objection to question 7, put most eloquently by Donna Barr; "No Required Reading! Is Fascist Plot!!"). Others felt that their opinions were unimportant. (Untrue! Why would someone ask a question they didn't want you to answer? Don't answer that.)

Moving right along then: Questions 1 and 2 were for the mailing list. Question 2 was *two* parts; What's your phone number, and *Do you want it published?* For those who gave their numbers, but did not say "Yes" or "No" to wanting it published, I am not publishing their numbers, since I want to be certain before I do that. They are in the computer, though, and it will be an easy thing to change them to "Publish" status for the next address list.

Question 3 asked for a list of CG's that you own. This has deep, mystical meaning that I'm not at liberty to discuss with novitiates. I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you.

Question 4 asked you to pick your favorite pieces, by page and issue. This was more for Ed's information, so he knows what he's done right. CG is not meant to be a contest—there aren't any losers. As long as you know what *you* like, whether everybody else likes it is irrelevent.

Question 5 is where we started getting serious, and where compiling this started to get awful. In all, *166* different magazines were listed! Any time two people agreed on one, that skyrocketted its popularity into the celestial percentiles. The question asked you to recommend magazines. By far the most recommended was *National Geographic*, largely for their excellent photography. Second was *Smithsonian*. Third was *Centaurs Gatherum*, tied with *Southwest Art*. Not a bad showing for a small press, eh, Ed? Others in the top ten were: *Factsheet 5, Natural History, Omni, Wildlife Art News, Horse Illustrated,* and Steve Gallacci's *Albedo* series (I counted comics as magazines). *Analog,* and *Asimov's Science Fiction* were the favorite anthology magazines. My favorite title: *Better Bassoons and Bagpipes*. Hardest to print was supplied by Mendy Hill. No, I'm not even going to attempt to cajole Japanese characters out of this word processor.

Question 6 asked you to suggest movies, though some people didn't really feel that recommending movies was a good idea. Hey, this is all in fun, and I promise sincerely not to put a gun to someone's head and drag them to any movie in this list. It would take me a long time, anyway: 187 movies were recommended. At an average of 100 minutes each, we'd be watching for two solid weeks without a break! Easily the #1 most liked movie was *Fantasia*. Actually, "Disney movies," or "Disney Animation" were also strongly liked. Second choice surprised me a bit: *It's a Wonderful Life*. (at least one person specified the Jimmy Stewart version—I had forgotten about the Marlo Thomas version—understandably.) Next came *Star Wars*. I lumped all three movies in here, even though some specifically stated "*Star Wars*" rather than the trilogy. For those living in caves, George Lucas is looking at doing the first three movies in what was intended to be a set of nine. Keen! Stanley Kubrik's *2001* was next—every time I see that flick, I'm impressed by how well it has resisted aging. Now, this is where the question took me completely by surprise, because the next most popular has only recently been available in English: *Akira*. This is japanese animation, and visually very impressive. I'm sorry it never came to the big screen around here. Another non-English hit was *Laputa*, a japanese animation with a strong Winsor McCay/Moebius look to it. Try to see it with someone who knows the plot, because it puts the awesome animation into a context, which makes it even more fun. (The other films by the same creator I recommend are *Nausicäa*, which several people also mentioned, *Totoro*, and *Kiki's Delivery Service*) The japanese animation came in even with *Dances With Wolves*, which swept the Academy Awards last year. Go figure. After that came: *Clockwork Orange, Edward Scissorhands, "Indiana Jones"* movies (1 and 3 were usually mentioned), *Koyaanisqatsi, The Last Unicorn, The Little Mermaid, The Lost Boys*, and *The Wizard of Oz*, in that order

Question 7 asked if there were any books you thought should be required reading. A number of people simply answered "Yes" and went on. Well, it's an honest answer, you have to admit. In all, 191 books, authors and categories were listed as being important. Recommendations ranged from the timid to the downright pushy: ("**Rupert Shelldrake's *A New Science of Life, the hypothesis of formative causation*—Every reductionist should be forced to read this!**") Many people preferred to list their favorite authors, rather than a specific book. Still others thought that *categories* of books were the important thing, such as fantasy, myths, horse books, etc. This made this question harder to compile than any before it (it got worse after). With apologies, then, this is rather the way I saw it: Single most favorite stories were the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. If you add *The Hobbit* in with that, even moreso. Second most mentioned was books by Piers Anthony. It would have been a tie, but some liked *Xanth*, and others preferred *Incarnations of Immortality*. *The Bible* came next. Some mentioned specific books from the Bible, or specific versions, but I lumped them all into one category (c'mon! It was hard enough finding two people recommending the same *book!*) Interestingly, most of the people who mentioned *The Holy Bible* recommended it as a guide to spiritual strength, rather than as a manual for judging the worth of other Christians. That's a refreshing change over the chrome and glass, mass-media religion that pollutes the airwaves in this neck of the woods, feeding on the

Kevin Hopkins-"All artists may reserve one page to introduce themselves and their work. This may also include information on prices and how to contact the artists for sales." (*Write Kevin for a complete rundown on the zine -vw*)

old and troubled. Anybody want a really *big* statue of some praying hands, cheap?

As often recommended was Robert Heinlein. *Anything* by Robert Heinlein. Many people recommended specific books they loved, such as *Stranger in a Strange Land, The Star Beast, Starship Troopers*, etc. Had I lumped them together, he would have beaten Tolkien easily. I grew up on Heinlein's books. He will be missed. Jack Chalker's *Well World* series was also popular. Lots of centaurs there.

After Robert Heinlein came Mercedes Lackey, with her *Valdemar* series. She spins a fine talking-horse yarn. ☺ She's also notorious for writing books faster than her fans can read them. She tied with Anne McCaffrey's *Pern* books, *Wizard* by John Varley, and the plays of Shakespeare.

After that came *Demon*, by John Varley, the novels of Andre Norton, the vampire books of Anne Rice, and Alan Dean Foster's *Spellsinger* series. Most everything else mentioned falls under the "miscellaneous," category. This isn't an indication of relative merit. It just means that I can't include four pages (literally!) worth of titles here.

Question 8 asked what kind of pets you have. This was something of a surprise, as well. Most people have one cat. That's no surprise. The surprise was that as many have *two* cats. Next most popular was having one dog. The forty-seven respondants own 123 cats, making an average of about 2½ cats per person. (Two people each reported actually *owning* 2½ cats) The 22 dog owners, on the other hand, owned an average of 3.6 dogs each. This would be a lot lower, but for Bonnie Dalzel, who owns *45 Russian Wolfhounds* (Borzoi). Yes, she listed their names. Fish of various sorts were third most popular. Twenty-four people had no pets, for various reasons, ranging from allergies to "I ate them." Prize for Least Active Pets goes to the "Zuni rock fetishes," and "Hermie The Fly (deceased)." (I wonder if some people didn't take this quite seriously?) "Mr. Fluff—Pedigreed, imported Euroscandanavian pocket lint—awarded Strangest of Show 15 years running." (naah.)

Question 9 asked what sort of food you like. This was my Waterloo. I caved in early and admitted to being soundly defeated. What I have is just an impression from reading through your answers, rather than a scientific (ha!) analysis such as I used on the previous questions: Big favorites seem to be Chocolate and Pizza, Chinese food and lasagne coming in a close third. Some people's Sin foods were other people's staples, and few people liked the same things in the same way, especially where meat was concerned. From sushi to blackened swordfish to raw beef. Someday I may get adventurous and try to find some patterns in there, but for now I'm going to toss it on Ed's head and see what he can make of it. ☺

Question 10 was a 5-parter, disguised as a 3-parter, related to music. What I did on this one was categorize the responses as: albums, composers, groups, etc. Part of the reason Ed asked this is because he likes getting tapes of good obscure music and enjoys trading tapes with people to spread it around (hint, hint). He is also building a CD library, but blind experimentation can be costly. I didn't really focus on the part about what CD's you recommended, because almost everything available on vinyl is now available on CD. Quite a few people do not have CD players, either, and a few were rather hostile about them. I imagine all the 8-Track owners felt equally hostile, twenty years ago, about the now-ubiquitous Phillips Compact Cassette.

In all, you recommended over *four hundred* different albums, composers, groups, and styles of music. It was interesting to note that people who filled in nothing else on the survey filled in the music section. I think this shows just how strongly people feel about music. Most often recommended were Bach (most of you didn't say which one, but I assumed for simplicity's sake that you meant Johann Sebastian), and The Beatles. Beethoven, Mannheim Steamroller (especially the *Fresh Aire* C.D.'s), and Kate Bush tied for next favorite. (Shameless plug: Kate Bush is a *genius*, but of course, Beethoven was far beyond that). Close behind Beethoven was Mozart, who hasn't done a tour in ages, but is reputed to be negotiating to get the old band back together to promote his new *Requiem* release (on IRS). "Miscellaneous classical music" was next most often recommended. I had always suspected that CG readers were æsthetes. I don't know who Steeleye Span is, but I intend to find out, as they were recommended a bit more often than a couple of *my* favorites, Peter Gabriel and Billy Joel. Abba, who tied, was somebody's choice for an "obscure" group. I decided any group that was mentioned more than three times could hardly be called obscure. Heck, any group mentioned more than *once* was not obscure enough. Some of the more interesting obscurities include: Killdozer, Chuck Waggon and the Wheels, Ned's Atomic Dustbin, Two Nice Girls From Texas, Love Tractor, Duck Duck, and Jive Bunny and the Mastermixer. Doctor Demento ain't got nothin' on CG readers for obscurity!

Question 11 was in three parts: Would you buy a "Best Of" issue? Would you buy an "X-Rated" issue? and; "Would you pay $50 for copies of everything that I have not printed yet?"

I boiled the answers down into "yes," "no," and a third category that included everything else, from no reply, to "maybe," to one answer so elaborate and vague that it was hard to tell if it contained an opinion one way or the other! Whether any action results from these will depend on what Ed can manage.

On the "Best Of" question: 67 said "yes," 9 said "no," and 13 said "maybe." Several people thought that an annual edition would be a good idea. Most who said "no" said it was because they had all the back issues. The rest were "definite maybes," though one person mentioned that a "Best-Of" might intimidate less confident artists. Maybe, but what a rush to be one of those selected as "best!"

On the "X-Rated" question: 69 said "yes" (pretty freudian, if you ask me), 10 said "no," and 11 said "maybe." Response to this one was a bit more spirited, with answers running from "Yeah!! X-Rated Kicks *Butt!!*" to "*NO!!!*" Those who said "maybe" were concerned that it be done in good taste, and with quality artwork. A couple of people were confused because Ed asked if they would buy *an* X-Rated issue, instead of *another* X-Rated issue. That's right; there's already been one, which would make this CGX #2. Ed gets very little high-quality X-Rated centaur art, though, so these are difficult to fill; Artists must express as much interest in filling it as readers do in buying it for it to come about. (hint, hint, hint) This would *not* go out as a regular issue, being available only by special order, so those who said "no" need not ever see it.

Karena Kliefoth-"YeeHAH! Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span are coming to NORTHAMPTON! Tanniver & I danced around the room in joy when we heard that! I've already bought my Fairport Convention tickets!"

The question about "$50 for the unprinted stuff" caused an amazing amount confusion, somewhat understandably. About equal numbers said "Yes, no" and "?????" Several people wanted to pay lesser amounts for portions of the unprinted stack. I don't know if that'll work. There has been a tendency to call this unprinted reserve a "reject stack," or "slush pile." That isn't a fair label. Let me describe this file; Ed gets, sometimes, twice as much art as he has space to print. Some issues, the decisions are heart-breaking; Mary Lynn Skirvin might have four excellent pieces, for example, but Ed decides to sacrifice one of them to make space for a new artist who may not be as polished as Mary, but whom he thinks you'll like to see. Those of you who are artists know how often you've been irritated at Ed for not printing the piece that *you* thought was best. Those pieces are in the stack. Some pieces are very good, but don't have anything to do with centaurs. Those are also in the stack. Some are quick bits done on envelopes, or in the margins of letters. Some are just over-used poses, though otherwise good pieces. Some are pieces that the artists (Mary Skirvin-Johnson and Donna Barr come to mind) have requested not be included in the Gatherum (what about those, Ed?) A large chunk, with apologies to all the struggling artists out there who are giving it all your heart, are simply not very good art (some of mine fall under this category, so don't be discouraged). Trust me, $50 would barely cover the cost of copies and mailing—Maybe.

Question 12 was an odd one, regarding what sort of refund you would want if Ed were forced to stop publishing. This has been the longest hiatus in *years* for the Gatherum, but it is not nearly dead yet, so don't panic. I think Ed was trying to guage your loyalty, to see if you would make an adequate assault force in his bid to conquer the Eastern Bloc nations. Then again, maybe not.

Question 13 asked how you like to relax. It breaks my heart, but there were too many excellent answers to include. Most often heard from professional artists was (verbatim) "Relax? What's that?" Often heard method of relaxation from amateurs: "Drawing." (Beware! That's how it *starts!*) Most popular way of relaxing was reading, or listening to ... something: Radio, stereo, television, "any humming machine," etc. Some of the more interesting included: "Stare at the wall and drool, when not whimpering and shivering;" "...either slipon my BIG POOFY PINK HOUSE SHOES, *OR!!* I hop in (P.J.) my car, and run red lights. That usually relaxes me." "I sit on my butt. In a bad cold spell, like now, I come home and stand for awhile before sitting, to thaw my butt-cheeks, which prevents shattering upon impact with the chair." "Race my dogs." "Irritate bookstore clerks by sitting and reading books without buying anything." "Screaming." "Falconry." "Body massage, a good beer, sex, crossword puzzles, sleep, and combinations of the above." "A bath—a really long bath until I turn into a raisin." "I don't remember." "Sitting back and recording and editing Tiny Toons adventures and Chip and Dale's rescue Rangers on my fleet of VCR's." "Dig through other people's trash in search of recyclable cans and bottles." "Horizontally." "Hit things and scream," "Relaxed is my normal status. If I try to get below that, I tend to fall asleep."

Question 14 asked what your job is and if you like it. Suprising in some ways, but not in others, was that more CG readers were pro artists than anything else. Exactly two are attempting to make their living as comics artists (not recommended for the faint of heart!). The next most common job was a sort of lumped together "Computer graphics/art/design," (all computer categories lumped together would have put *that* in top position) tied with "Student," and "Unemployed." A whopping 1.08 percent of respondants listed their occupation as "Eccentric Billionaire in Charge of Hiring Pretty Women to have Sex With."

Question 15 asked what the next survey should ask, and what Ed should print more or less of (or any).

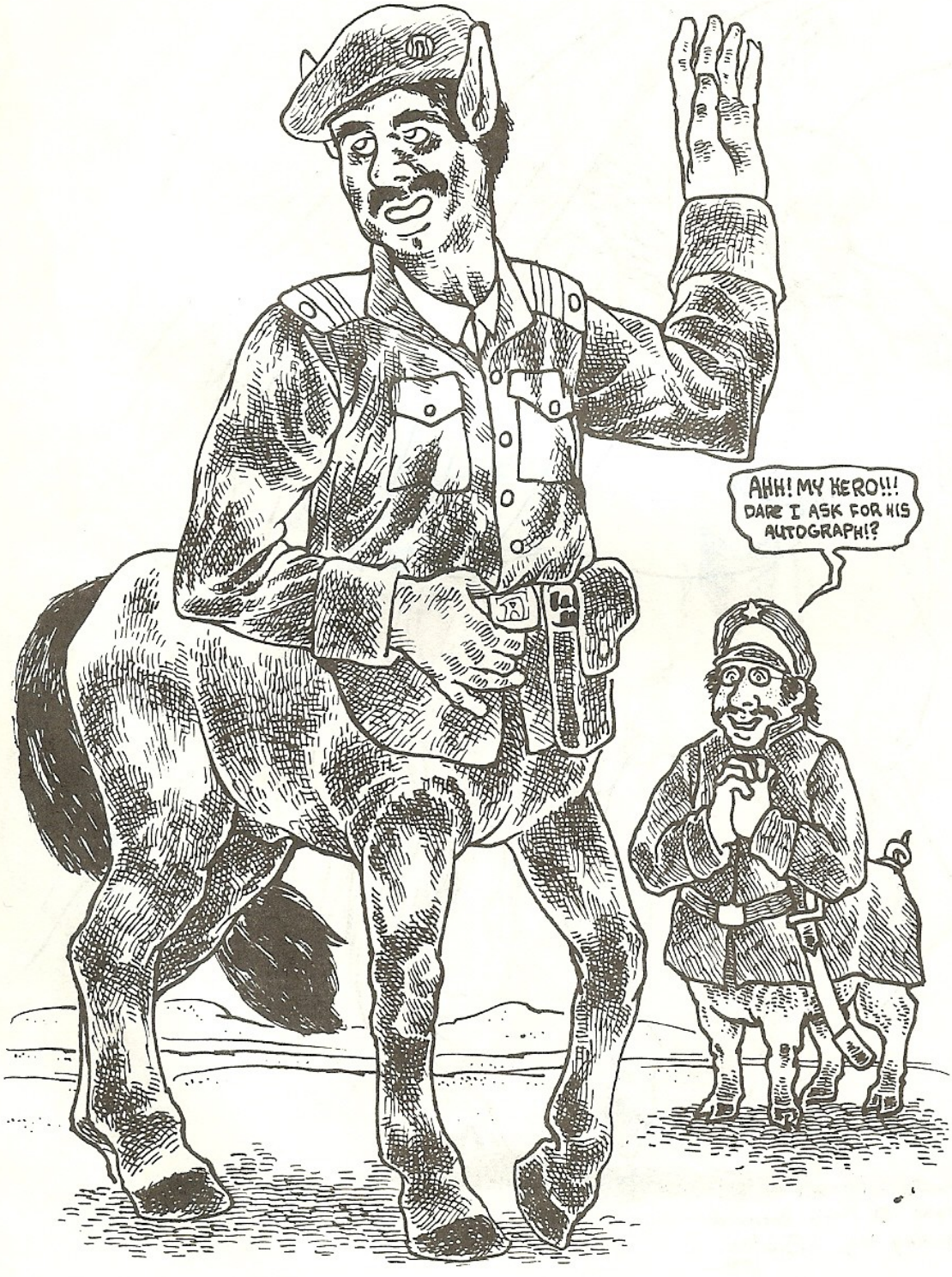
If anyone is interested in seeing the listings of movies, books, magazines and music, send a SASE (fifty-two cents postage) to me (Victor Wren) and I will send you the lists I've compiled, with "+" signs marking votes. Until the next survey, then!

Paula Schricker-"Wondering if you would mind if I switched over to a word processor. I know many people feel that computer-written letters are cold and impersonal. However, they *are* easy to read." *(Anyone knowing Paula's current whereabouts should drop her into the nearest postal receptacle, postage collect. Forwarding guaranteed! -vw)*

Heather Bruton-"Well, my biggest news is that I've gone professional. I quit my job as of December 19. I am going to do art full-time. Rather scary, but most definitely exhilarating ... The cats should enjoy it. They love company."

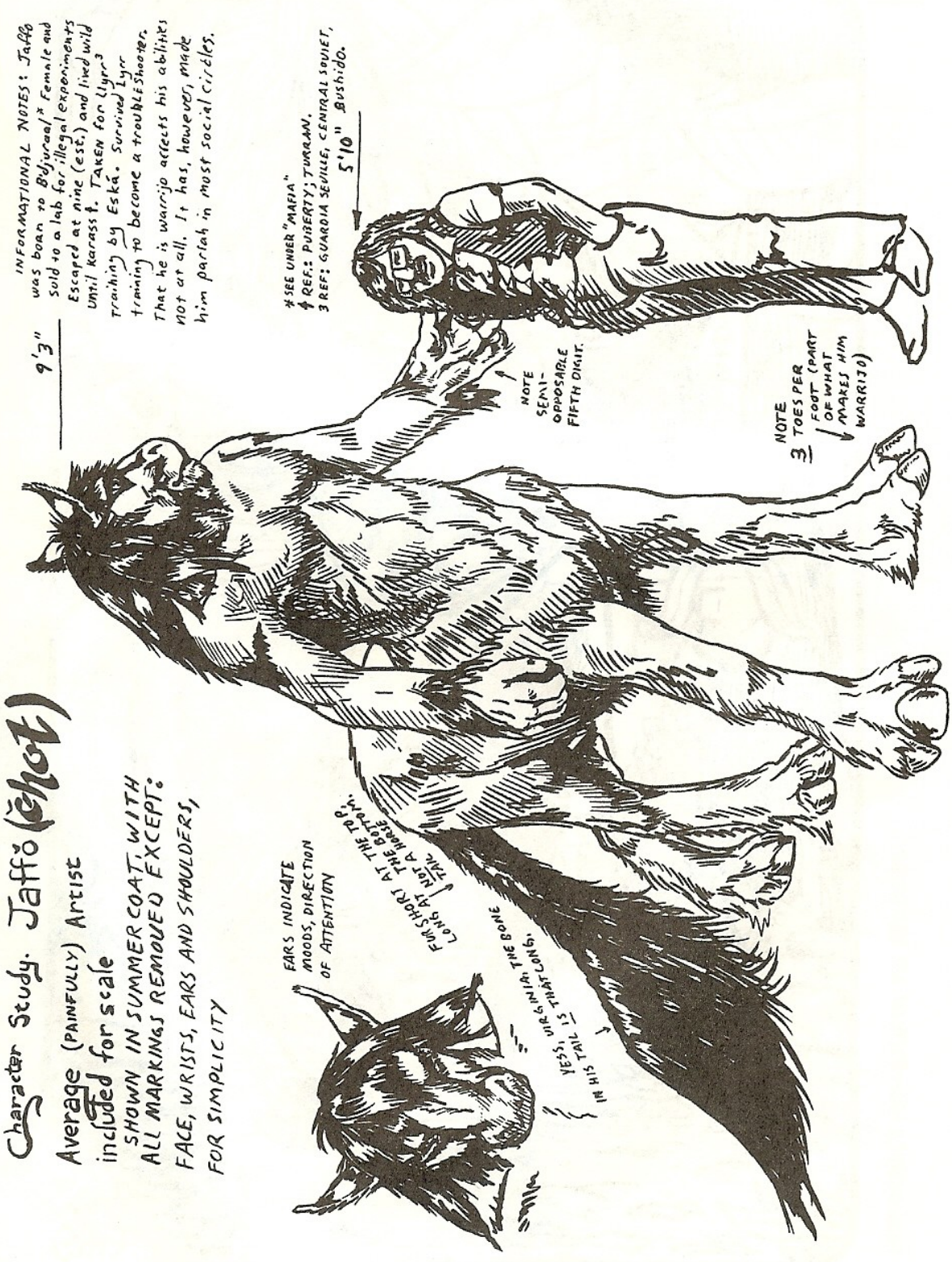
Brake © Mark Barnard
Drawing by HBruton
1990

Parsonavich-"Speaking of Saddam, I'm holding you to your promise that you would print the Saddamtaur in CG if he was still in power when it was publishing time. I'm defining power in the narrow sense. I don't care if there is a Shi'ite republic in southern Iraq, or a Kurdish separatists movement in the north. If Saddam is still in Baghdad, you gotta print it!" (*Your wish is Ed's command, and Ed's command is good for hours of amusement from the irreverent, underpaid, underfed, provisionary running-dog editorial staff. And it* **still** *got printed. Impressed? -vw*)



Bill Fitts. Quote Dave Kraklow-"Yeah... it's a shame it's so hard to find good horse songs... I was really surprised & delighted to find that last cut on Mike Oldfield's *Ommadawn* album... it's so fun... and almost so different from what he usually does."

Victor Wren - Oh heck. Now I have to come up with a quote, here. Strange, but I never write myself any letters. I really ought to keep in better touch. Anyway, this is the "simplified" version of Jaffó. To fully render his markings would take a lot of time and more talent than I currently own. Animals impress the heck out of me.


Character Study. Jaffó (Ghost)
Average (painfully) Artist included for scale
SHOWN IN SUMMER COAT, WITH ALL MARKINGS REMOVED EXCEPT: FACE, WRISTS, EARS AND SHOULDERS, FOR SIMPLICITY
9'3"
INFORMATIONAL NOTES: Jaffó was born to Bijuraal* female and sold to a lab for illegal experiments. Escaped at nine (est.) and lived wild until karass f. TAKEN for Llyr's training by Eskä. Survived Llyr training to become a troubleshooter. That he is warrijo affects his abilities not at all. It has, however, made him partah in most social circles.
*SEE UNDER "MAFIA"
4 REF.: PUBERTY; TURAAN.
3 REF.: GUARDIA SEVILLE, CENTRAL SOVIET.
5'10" Bushido.
NOTE SEMI-OPPOSABLE FIFTH DIGIT.
NOTE 3 TOES PER FOOT (PART OF WHAT MAKES HIM WARRIJO)
EARS INDICATE MOODS, DIRECTION OF ATTENTION
FURLOUGH AT THE BOTTOM OF A LONG TAIL
YES!, HE HAS THAT LONG. IN HIS TAIL IS THE BONE

Michael Higgs-"I work in a giant toystore. Draw your own conclusions."

Roy D. Pounds II-"My 'solar' nachos didn't quite work out. I ended up tossing them on the grill and still the cheese wouldn't melt! They didn't taste all that good anyways. You know how it is with high-altitude cooking!"

Rodford E. Smith-"I was recently awarded the title *Kyoshi* in karate class. This means 'senior instructor.'"

The Cold From Beyond

by Rodford E. Smith

Paul walked slowly down the shadowy street, weaving a bit and staggering every now and then. He was bait, in an attempt to draw out whoever was toasting street people There had been over thirty mysterious deaths in Louisville the past week, and the mayor had asked the Kentucky State Police for help. They, in turn, had included Paul in the project, since there were indications that the deaths might be the work of one or more rogue Gifted.

It was cold enough to make Paul shiver inside his threadbare "bum's" outfit, and the eerie light-dark patterns on these back streets didn't help his mood. He just hoped that the two policemen assigned as his backup were on the alert; he hadn't spotted them in over an hour.

Paul and the others in the special team had been taken to the morgue to view the remains, in the hope that this might help them recognize the perpetrator. Actually, the bodies looked less like they had been burned than left in an oven for too long. They had a kind of cooked, dried-out appearance to them; they were desiccated and browned, and the skin had split, leaving an ooze of thickened blood on much of the body and clothing. One look had been enough for Paul. Homeless people were so frightened that they were committing minor crimes to be thrown in jail for the night. The unusual appearance of the corpses had experts convinced that something paranormal was at work. Which probably meant Gifted.

If it was a Gifted gone wrong, Paul wanted to stop him or her now, before anyone else was killed. Paul had heard from a number of sources that they expected a witch hunt against the Gifted any day now, due to the trouble that the small number of rogues had already caused. Something like this could touch that off.

It was three in the morning and Paul had been on the job for more than two hours. There were other decoys performing the same job in other areas, and other officers watching them as backup. Paul, due to his abilities and experience, had been assigned the most likely block. He didn't enjoy the situation, but had to admit that he was the best qualified for the job.

Still, there didn't seem to be much happening. The only people he had seen were wary and secretive, some actually fleeing Paul's approach. They were scared; the whole *city* was scared.

Then, with typical suddenness, it all went wrong. A man stepped out of the alley ahead, and came straight for Paul. He didn't hurry, he didn't swerve, he simply walked purposefully forward and reached out. Paul dodged back, confident that his heightened speed and dexterity would enable him to evade the other's grasp. He was almost right.

The stranger's hand grazed Paul's shoulder, and that brief touch sent an agony of cold through the whole left side of his body. Paul gasped, and staggered backward as the stranger came at him again, this time with inhuman speed.

Paul knew one thing; he couldn't let himself be touched like that again. He dodged, already recovering, and started yelling for help. The stranger ignored Paul's cries and continued grabbing. Paul kicked the man in the stomach, hoping that his thick boots would protect him. They did; he only felt a little of that strange cold. The blow had been hard enough to pulp a normal man, but the stranger only grunted and fell backwards. Paul decided to put a little distance between them. He shifted into a cheetah and sprinted down the street.

A block away Paul stopped, and switched back to human form. Already he could hear his partners running to his aid, but the stranger was charging out of the alley with incredible speed. Paul picked up a concrete bench and threw it at the man. The stranger dodged, then started as he realized that there were two other people approaching, and whirled to face them. He snarled a wordless challenge at the officers as they slid to a stop, shotguns ready.

"Watch it!" Paul called in warning. "He's at least a strong as I am!"

Seeing the two normals pause, the stranger snarled at them again, and turned his attention back to Paul. Officer Grady ordered him to halt, twice, then fired a warning shot. The strange figure ignored him and continued toward Paul. As it reached the circle of light under the street lamp, Paul saw it clearly for the first time, and he suddenly *knew* that this thing, whatever it might once have been, was not human.

Paul grabbed a traffic sign and twisted it until it snapped off just above the sidewalk. Brandishing his makeshift spear, he circled, maneuvering so that policemen had a clear line of fire. The creature snarled at him, but there was a hungry gleam in its eyes that told Paul it wasn't about to give up.

Without warning, it charged. Both officers fired, both hitting. The thing screamed and staggered, but continued its charge. Paul braced himself, and aimed the jagged point of the channel post at its heart. The creature impaled itself neatly.

That wasn't the end of it. There was an eruption of energy, a flare of silver light as the metal entered the thing's body. Paul yelled and jumped back, dropping ungracefully into a sitting position, shielding his eyes against the glare in an effort to see what was happening. In moments it was over, and all that was left was a pile of ashes and a half-melted post.

"Don't ask me what it was," said Paul, back at the Precinct headquarters. "I don't know. We may never know. But at least we got it."

"You think so?" asked Detective Anderson, who was heading the special task force assigned this duty.

Rodford E. Smith-"There come times in our lives when, to recharge our mental batteries, we need a period of complete, mind-blanking inactivity. That is what TV is for.☺"

"Just before you arrived, we got a call from a unit sent to check on another of our decoy parties. The black-and-white found three more of those shriveled bodies, two of them in uniforms. All their weapons had been fired, some of them emptied."

"Oh, God," groaned Paul, in dismay. "There's more than one of them."

It was ridiculous; here Marian was, letting herself be tossed around like an empty garbage can by a man a fraction her weight! And a normal man at that! Of course, she had asked for this, literally. Since she seemed to keep getting involved in dangerous situations, Marian had finally decided to learn to fight, so she would know how to handle herself in a violent confrontation. Of course, she hadn't realized just how humiliating this sort of thing was for a beginner.

"Pay attention," Red told her, gently but firmly. "All right, give it a try."

He had forbidden Marian the use of her paranormal strength, instead insisting that she first learn the proper way to do each technique, without muscling her way through. Red had explained that learning to do it without "cheating" would not only help her against opponents who were stronger than she, it would teach her the control needed to keep from hurting those weaker. That made enough sense that Marian had kept strict obedience.

She grabbed Red in the formal grip, pulling him to her, then lifting and pushing backwards in a circular motion while catching him behind the knee with a forefoot. Red landed ten feet away, his fall padded by the thick grass on the Center's back lawn and blunted by a double slap at the ground. Marian watched in envy as he then bounded lightly to his feet, smiling.

"Very good. Now, again."

Marian winced, but reminded herself that she needed this practice. They resumed the formal positioning, the *kumi kata* grip, and Marian performed the throw again.

"Not quite as smooth this time, but still good. Again."

Marian was wearing the top to Red's Judo *gi*. He had made a point of insisting that she wear something under it, and after he had thrown her a couple of times she had seen why. A Judo top is supposed to be loose.

They practiced the *Kouchigari* until Red was satisfied, then moved on to another throw. They had started their workouts three weeks earlier, with what Red referred to as the "hard" techniques; blocks, punches and kicks. Then he had begun showing her the "soft" system: throws, chokes and counter joint movements. The main difficulty had been in finding procedures appropriate to Marian's unusual form. Many maneuvers simply wouldn't work for her, and others had to be adapted. Still, she now had about a dozen attacks and defenses which she was confident with in her arsenal. As an added benefit, she was becoming more dexterous and aware of her physical self. If for no other reason, that was enough for Marian to continue.

A car pulled into the parking lot behind the Center, and sounded its horn. It was Clint.

"I guess we can break a little early for once," Red announced, grinning, as Marian turned to wave. "Now, where did I put my glasses?"

Clint walked over to join them as Red gathered their equipment.

"Are you finished beating on my love for now?" Clint asked, as he affectionately put his arm around Marian's waist.

"I'm havin' trouble gettin' her to work out on her own," Red told Clint, his accent back now that class was over.

"I don't need the exercise," Marian countered. "My Gift keeps me in perfect physical condition."

"Yeah, but exercise also helps train body and mind to work together," Red explained. "So keep it up."

"Yes, *sensei*," she sighed, teasing him with his title.

"That's all she needs," grumped Clint, jokingly. "More muscles."

"That's all she needs," repeated Marian, duplicating Clint's voice exactly. "More muscles."

"That's all she needs," repeated Red, doing a fair imitation of Clint's voice. "More muscles."

"Great," the paramedic muttered, "now I'm getting it in stereo."

They walked back into the Center slowly, Marian tired but contentedly swishing her tail, Clint with his arm around her waist, Red buoyant, talking the whole time.

When they entered the lobby and saw the people gathered there, however, he stopped his chatter and peered owlishly about.

It was San Savant's "Council of War," the group he called together whenever something needing special attention by the Center came up. The members looked quite serious, as much so as Red could ever recall.

"Good, you're finished early," San Savant told Red. "We are waiting on you and Paul Lee to arrive before we start."

"Just let me get changed," Red told them, ducking into the Men's room with his gym bag.

About half the council were the actual field operatives. The other ten, including Red and Marian, were the planners and directors. Marian wondered what had happened overnight that was grave enough to demand calling the group together.

"Looks serious," said Marian. "Are you going to need me?"

San Savant looked at Marian and Clint for a moment, then reluctantly nodded.

"Oh, well," Clint sighed. "That's what I get for dating an executive type. I'll call you tomorrow and

we'll reschedule."

Clint stood on tip-toe and kissed Marian goodbye. She watched him leave, regret showing on her face, then turned to find Flow looking at her.

"What are you grinning about?"

"Just thinking about how much you have changed since we first met, at Donald Criswold's mansion last year," Flow replied. "You've gone from being shy and almost painfully insecure to practically running this place."

"That's pretty much the way my whole life has been." Marian shrugged. "Take my job at the real estate agency. I started there five years ago as a secretary, and today I'm an executive assistant. My boss is even talking now about making me an assistant manager."

"Those who have been successful since gettin' their Gift were generally successful before gettin' it," Red pointed out, as he re-joined the group.

Paul Lee arrived a few minutes later, looking tired. San Savant led the group into the conference room and started the meeting.

"My friends, there is a menace loose in the city of Louisville which so far has claimed thirty-eight lives that we know of," San Savant began. "Last night, Paul confronted a monster in human form that seems to be connected to these deaths, and destroyed it. Unfortunately, it now appears that there may be more than one of these creatures. Paul, would you please tell them the details of what happened to you, and what you have learned since?"

Paul obliged, and the group listened as he matter-of-factly recounted the events of the previous night.

"So it seems that there is at least one more of these things running around Louisville." Paul stopped to take a long drink from the mug of coffee before him. "Anyway, the various officials involved agree that this problem requires the Center's help. I'm here to get it."

"So lead shotgun pellets—or were they steel?" asked Red. "Never mind—anyway, the shotgun blasts didn't hurt it much, but spearing it did."

"I don't know if that was because I did more damage or if I just grounded it." Paul paused a moment thinking. "I'll tell you something else; it was colder the closer I got to that thing."

Marian had never seen such an assembly of Gifted before, not even at the conference a few months back. More strangely, all of them were outfitted for battle. With Paul's experience to go on, the were heavily dressed, including gloves and boots. Some wore actual armor of one kind or another. There were even several normals in the group, Red included. Most of these were armed, either with guns or something more unusual. Only a few of the Gifted carried weapons. What impressed Marian most of all was that this was only the first of three shifts!

The scene was the lobby of the Louisville City Hall. At San Savant's request, dozens of Gifted from all over the region, and a handful from farther afield, had converged here in less than 24 hours. The strange murders had continued, despite the fact that the special patrols had destroyed two more of the human-like creatures. Marian was beginning to wonder if this was an epidemic.

"May I have your attention, please," called Police Detective Samuel Anderson. He was the unofficial expert in the paranormal on the Louisville Police Department, and had worked with Gifted individuals on several previous cases where their help was needed. Now he was in charge of this madhouse. "A few final words. From what we learned last night, we now know that these things are not all the same. One of the murderers killed last night was much more cunning that the other one, which was more like what Paul fought two nights ago. Also, is seems that they will go after Gifted in preference to normals. So be careful. Now, does everyone have their assignment?"

There was a chorus of affirmatives.

"Okay. Get with your police partners. Do what they tell you. And for heaven's sake, don't attack unless you or someone else is in danger! Now go to it."

Marian watched them leave with a deep feeling of unease. She was on third shift, early the next morning, and would be teamed with a couple of officers she hadn't met yet. Meantime, she was helping run the command center which had been set up to deal with the situation. She wasn't looking forward to her duty the next morning, but Louisville was a big place, and every available pair of eyes was needed to comb through the possible hiding places. She just hoped she wouldn't have to kill. She didn't think she could handle that, especially something which looked so human.

Marian came out of her reverie as she noticed that Anderson was talking quietly to San Savant. Curious, she walked over to them, her rubber shoes squeaking on the polished floor.

"Hello, Marian," sighed San Savant. "Detective Anderson just delivered some disturbing details about one of the creatures which were killed last night. It seems they've identified the person."

"You mean that this was someone real, and not just a creature that looked like a person?"

"Apparently," said Anderson. "This one was killed outside a house. It was just standing there, looking in a window. When it attacked the officers who went to question it, and they killed it—by the way, Pietr, thank you for the suggestion about the spear guns—anyway, the occupant came out to see what all the noise was, and became hysterical. Turns out it was her son, who disappeared a couple of days ago."

Maggie Fox-"Excuse the paper; I usually do not write friends on an artistic rendition of the lungs."

"We don't know yet whether these things are somehow possessing humans, or merely duplicating them, but except for the damage this one accumulated it appears to match the person it looks like exactly, right down to dental records and finger prints." San Savant thought for a moment, then turned to Anderson. "We need one alive to study. I know that is asking a lot, but it has to be done."

"I'll pass the word," Anderson told him. "But don't expect me to jeopardize either police of civilians to get your specimen."

The body was bloated, spattered with blood, the lips full and ruddy, and there was stench of decay about it, although the corpse appeared fresh.

"She's breathing!" whispered Officer Blount.

"I think you will find that its heart is beating, also," San Savant offered. "What good is a dead host to a parasite?"

"It has just been lying there since those boys found it, this morning," said Detective Anderson. "I ordered a guard put on this place, but left it alone, like you wanted."

"Excellent," San Savant replied. "The only way we will be able to understand these creatures is by careful study. That can't be done in the middle of a fight."

"Think you'll be all right working close to that thing?"

"I have a number of charms and spells active to protect me," San Savant told him. He glanced over at the three officers armed with spear guns, standing by. "Besides, the metal shafts of those spears worked well enough the past two nights."

"Well, be careful, anyway," returned Anderson, as he and Blount moved away.

"Believe me, I will." San Savant crouched down near the creature, examining it for a moment. Then he reached into his case and produced several items, laying them out on the floor in front of him. "Now, my friend, I'm afraid I'm going to have to disturb your rest."

It took over an hour, but San Savant finally gained the information he wanted. He stood, stretched, then moved away. The creature continued to strain futilely at the magical restraints placed upon it, howling and screaming.

"You might as well destroy it," San Savant told Anderson.

"There's no chance of a cure?"

"None," the wizard replied, shaking his head. "There's nothing left to be saved. Oh, there are a few memory traces left, but for the most part all the synaptic paths have been burned away, except for the motor control area and other portions needed to keep the host going."

Anderson motioned for his men to move forward.

"Y'know, that bit about some of the memories still being active might explain why they sometimes return home."

"It could, indeed," replied San Savant, wincing as the creature shrieked before finally crumbling to dust.

Later, at the room in City Hall which had been set aside for their use, San Savant held a briefing to relay what he had learned.

"When I first heard Paul's story, it rang a faint chime in the dim recesses of my memory," he told them. "I began checking my library, and called around to a number of friends and acquaintances, here and in Europe. These helped me organize my recollections, and to locate a first-order source."

San Savant pulled an ancient, leather-bound journal out of his briefcase, placing it reverently on the table.

"As it turned out, that source was written by an ancestor of mine, roughly a century and a half ago. He was an official in my homeland, and therefore had his nose into just about everything which went on there. One of the strangest events, which to this day is related to the children of my family in the form of a fairy tale, talks of a series of mysterious deaths, with the corpses resembling closely those left by the creatures we are fighting. It was part of what seems to have been almost a plague, spread throughout the continent."

There was a general murmur around the conference room table at this. "Ancient superstitions and hokey religions strike again," was Red's comment.

"The problem was dealt with, and its source discovered," San Savant continued. "Taking into account the archaic phrasing, the—to you—foreign language and the fact that none of those involved had modern scientific training, I have paraphrased the conclusions reached."

San Savant pulled a sheaf of notes from his case, and began to read.

"'A hole was formed in space, in some manner unknown to us. Through this hole came a creature, immaterial and invisible to us, but a creature nonetheless, an animal with an animal's hunger. Our world was alien to it, so much so that it could not exist unaltered. To aid its survival it took possession of an innocent farm maid, using her as its vessel. Acting with great cunning, it hid by day and came out at night to feed, which it did by draining the life from its victims.'"

San Savant lowered his notes and looked up at those around him.

"'In many ways this creature resembles the Greek legend of the *Burcolakas* or *Vroucolaca*, also known as the as *Vrykolakas* or, more commonly, the *vampire*.'"

There was a general stir, which San Savant allowed to die down before continuing.

"The creatures which are the actual vampires come from a universe of vastly different physical properties

from ours," he explained. "Its contents are almost entirely energy, the inhabitants feeding upon its various forms and permutations, and upon each other. It seems that there is an entire ecosystem there. The creatures are as varied as owls and alligators. When the hole opened, some of them fell through, and they found themselves both drowning and starving. Like the Gift, and Life itself, they are partly electricity. Thus, some of them are able to enter living organisms, taking control of them. Since humans are the largest and most common organism in this city, humans are what they have possessed."

"The fact that there are so many different types explains why they act so differently," said Adamant, excitedly.

"Exactly. Some are grazers, some hunters, some trappers, and so on. None appear sentient, but we should be on the watch for such."

"What about finding the hole?" asked Red.

"The Wizard and Chuck are working on that, with help from a couple of Gifted who are clairvoyant. It should be located soon, and sealed soon after that."

"This sounds a lot like the gremlin invasion of the M.I. King library at UK last year," Red added.

"Yes, and in the future we need to establish some way to detect these dimensional rifts as they appear. There will likely be a lot more of them, since the Gifting."

"Poor things," said Flow. "They get sucked into our world, find themselves suddenly in trouble and latch blindly onto the first food source they come across. They aren't really to blame."

"Maybe not," observed Paul, "but they are still killing people. Once they are all dead, then I'll feel sorry for them."

"One important word of caution," San Savant told them. "They would find Gifted far more appetizing than normal humans. And far more energizing."

"What about me?" asked Adamant, looking worried.

"Yes, Ed, they can even steal your energy, but more slowly, due to the fact that it is so tightly bound to your physical substance."

There was nothing more to be said, so the group dispersed and went back to work.

"You should have seen it!" announced Reach, as he and Red entered the lobby. "Pow! One shot, right in the head! Must have been sixty feet away!"

"Will you stop saying that!" Red snapped.

Everyone was tired and irritable. It was three days since San Savant's study of the captured vampire, and all those working on the "Vampire Situation," as the media had dubbed it, were nearly exhausted. A total of twenty-three creatures had been found and dispatched, the hole had been located and sealed, and there had been no reports of bodies or attacks in twelve hours. Since San Savant claimed that the creatures couldn't go for more than about twenty hours without feeding, it seemed that the crisis would soon be over.

Detective Anderson entered just then, and his face announced the news before he opened his mouth. "Three more bodies," he told them, grimly. "Right in the middle of town. One of them no more than four hours old."

San Savant moved to the assignment board and began reading off the teams which would cover the buildings and other areas of possible concealment He planed for the them to cover a large radius from the location of the freshest body; this was probably the last vampire and he had no intention of letting it remain at large for long. Marian and Adamant were given responsibility for a construction sight, without police escort, since they, too, were stretched to the breaking point.

"Can't I sit this one out?" asked Marian. So far she had not needed to kill any of the creatures, and had only seen three in the process of being eliminated. Somehow, she felt that this time would be different.

"Sorry. There aren't any alternates recovered enough yet to go in your place."

Marian sighed and moved over to the table where she had laid her purse, gloves and jacket, as well as the blankets she used to wrap her equine portion, as protection against the vampires' touch. The Wizard intercepted her.

"A little something to help," he offered. "There aren't enough protective charms to go around, but I have a spell which should provide the same benefits, if only for the next few hours."

He reached up to cup Marian's head in his hands, and began chanting in a low murmur. Marian felt a warmth and vitality spread into her face, and from there down into the rest of her body. This continued for several long moments, before the Wizard, looking tired, broke contact.

Marian felt wired. She tingled from her head to her hooves.

"Thank you," she replied, simply. It was all she could think to say.

"I take care of my friends," the Wizard told her. "Lord knows, at my age I have few enough of them left."

The place was eerily silent, only an occasional cold breeze causing any stir. Being Sunday, the site was empty of workers, and the downtown area was practically abandoned anyway due the panic over the vampires. Even the watchman normally present was gone.

The building was about half finished. The steel framework was up, the lower two floors had the exterior

Elaine Moertl-"Well, I tried sushi again. That stuff is really great! No lie! I still haven't tried the more gross-looking fish, but what I did try were certainly worth it."

walls in place, and even some of the plumbing was working. Construction equipment and materials were everywhere, creating a jumble that would take hours to search. Marian, who knew nothing about this sort of thing, spread her hands helplessly, and turned to Adamant.

"Where do we start?"

For the first time, Marian noticed that the indestructible man was staring at a gem in his hand.

"Something new," he told her, absently, as he noticed her staring. "Chuck and the Wizard developed this while they were working on a way to find the hole."

He swung slowly back and forth, the crystal occasionally flashing dimly blue. Adamant shook his head.

"It's in there, somewhere, but all this metal is blocking the signal. Let's go in."

Adamant led the way, glancing at his doodlebug from time to time. Marian nervously gripped the spear-gun she had been issued. Adamant was armed, as usual, with only his wits and the exploding charm he had used months earlier against the Monster.

They were walking next to a stack of I-beams, when the crystal flared hurtfully bright. A noise made Marian look up; there, on top of the beams, was their target. Unfortunately, it seemed to think that they were the prey. It dropped onto Adamant as Marian shied violently back.

"Run!" Adamant yelled, as he grappled with the creature. Tiny sparks suddenly flickered across his skin.

Marian knew what that meant; she quickly ducked behind a wall. There was an enormous crack! and the sound of huge masses of metal falling. When it was quiet, Marian looked around to see what had happened.

There was no sign of Ed or the vampire. Presumably, the first was buried under the beams, while the latter had been destroyed. At least, she hoped so. Leaving her spear gun propped against the wall, Marian moved in and began shifting the debris. She saw something moving, and stood back. Her caution paid off. It was the vampire. Apparently, it had been blown away from Adamant, and then only lightly buried by the beams. Now, it was coming for her. It looked hungry.

Marian, realizing that Adamant was both safe and helpless for the moment, wheeled and ran. The vampire charged after her, but it was injured and she was fast enough that her lead increased.

She came into an area where equipment was stored; there was a poured concrete floor and a ceiling, but the only walls were those at the outside of the building, creating a large, open space. Marian couldn't see an easy way out; besides, if she left, the thing would be gone before she could bring back help. She looked for something to throw.

Nearby there were two large groupings of welding tanks, which looked heavy and sturdy enough to do some damage. She grabbed a green one and heaved it at the vampire as it came through the doorway. She missed, but the clangor and sparks seemed to unnerve the creature. She tossed another, forcing the vampire to dodge. The third tank hit on its valve, and went skittering away with a deafening hiss. That gave Marian an idea.

She placed the next tank carefully on the ground, aiming it at the creature, which was still advancing towards her. She stamped down with her left forefoot, shearing the neck off. The tank shot across the floor, catching the creature across the legs and knocking it down. Marian thought for a moment that it was finished, but it gave a cry and tried to struggle back to its feet. Marian began throwing tanks frantically, hitting nearly half the time now. Still the thing came towards her, crawling and shrieking terribly, its body damaged by the combination of Adamant's blast and the impact of the tanks. Still, these things healed supernaturally fast; Marian hoped she could hurt it faster than it regenerated.

Marian ran out of green tanks and shifted to the nearby stack of red ones. She grabbed a tank and lobbed it at the vampire, knocking the creature down again. Another tank followed, and another, breaking the necks off several of them as they hit the floor, filling the air with a terrible hissing. She was keeping the monster at a distance, but couldn't drive it away. Finally, she dropped another tank clangorously onto the concrete, nudged it into alignment with a hoof, and stamped. It shot away, towards her assailant, trailing sparks. Suddenly, a ball of flame erupted outward from the tank. Marian had time to realize that she had done something stupid, before the fire engulfed her.

Adamant struggled vainly to free himself. He could barely move, and lacked the strength to push any of the wreckage aside. He kept working at it, even though he realized that he would probably have to wait for help, or even the several hours it would take for the amulet to recharge.

Suddenly, there was a blast of heat, and a strange impact that was less like an explosion than a powerful gust of wind. The beams shifted, much of the pile being forced off Adamant. With a wrench of desperate strength, he forced an arm free. In minutes he had wriggled out of the trap, leaving most of his clothing behind in the process. Now, to find Marian.

He knew which way she had run, and that worried him, because it was also the direction from which the explosion had come. Adamant hoped Marian was all right, but had a dread feeling that she wasn't.

The work area was a disaster. The blast had ignited every flammable item inside the walls, including cans of tar, filling the place with thick smoke. In what seemed to have been the center of the conflagration Adamant saw the blackened remains of a human, apparently the vampire. About forty feet away was a young woman, naked, lying face down and unmoving. Of Marian there was no sign.

Adamant wanted to look for her, but the stranger obviously needed help. She must have been Gifted, otherwise she couldn't have survived, but she just as obviously hadn't come through the fire without harm.

April Lee—"Sometimes you have to trust that people are still regarding you kindly—even without physical evidence, such as long letters!"

As Adamant ran to her, he noticed that her skin had a strange, pinkish sheen to it, like the beginning of a sunburn. He knelt down next to the woman, and gently rolled her over. The face seemed strangely familiar, but at first he couldn't place it. The it hit him like a blow.

It was Marian.

A dozen thoughts tried to run through Adamant's brain at once. He chased them away, concentrating on the need of the moment. The woman, undeniably Marian, had a pulse and was breathing, but was soundly unconscious. The strange flush, which Adamant had originally thought to be from burns, he now realized was caused by the fact that her skin was baby-new, perfect and unblemished.

Adamant remembered the few examples he knew of a Gifted changing after a near-death experience. In every case, there had been a serious shock to the system, requiring medical care. He looked around, vaguely hoping that the ruckus of the past few minutes might have drawn some attention, but could neither see nor hear any sign that help was approaching.

Adamant cradled Marian in his arms and stood. He chanted the words that would activate the "City Hall Express" which San Savant had set up for emergencies.

The expression on Pinky's face as they suddenly appeared in the circle drawn on the conference room floor was priceless. There stood Adamant, nearly naked, holding a young woman, who was completely so. If the situation had been less serious, Adamant would have laughed out loud.

"That's Marian!" gasped Pinky, before Adamant could say anything.

She ran ahead of him, opening doors and leading the way to the infirmary. Doctor Swenson looked up, surprised, from dabbing iodine on Kid Power's arm, then abruptly went into medical emergency mode.

He shooed Kid Power aside and had Adamant put Marian on the table, then chased everyone but his two nurses out, despite Adamant's protests. Then he slammed the door.

Adamant was pacing back and forth when San Savant, the Wizard and several others arrived.

"What happened, Ed?" San Savant asked.

Adamant told them what he knew, then what he had guessed.

"She must have known that she couldn't get away, and tried something desperate. From the sounds I could hear, there was quite a fight before the explosion, and the vampire looked like it had been pretty well battered in addition to being flash-fried."

"What's going to happen to her?" asked Mrs. Thomas, Kid Power's mother.

"We know of at least five similar instances previous to this," San Savant explained to her. "That is, a great physical trauma causing a change in the expression of a person's Gift. In most cases there is a complete recovery. Since, from what Adamant said, Marian appears healthy, I think there's good reason to hope for the best."

"I wonder what powers she'll have this time?" mused Kid Power.

Just then the door opened, and Dr. Swenson looked out.

"Pietr, I need to see you. The rest of you have to stay out here, but I'll leave the door open so you can see."

As San Savant entered, the others crowded around the doorway to look. Marian, covered now with a sheet, was lying on the examination table, still unconscious. One nurse was taking her blood pressure while the other examined a thermometer. Swenson and San Savant stepped to the far end of the table, near Marian's head, and began talking quietly.

"My guess is that she'll regain consciousness soon," said Swenson. "I don't know what sort of mental state she'll be in or how she'll react to her change, so I want you here to calm her, and maybe help deal with any new powers she might manifest."

San Savant nodded. He bent over the young woman.

"Marian," he said softly. "Marian, can you hear me?"

Was it his imagination, or had her lips moved slightly? Dr. Swenson motioned the nurses back.

"Marian, you're safe now," San Savant continued. "Open your eyes. Wake up."

Marian definitely stirred this time. Then she moaned slightly, and opened her eyes, looking up at San Savant. For a moment this scene held, like a freeze frame. Then, with startling suddenness, four legs and a tail pushed out from under the sheet. The table, with a metallic death cry, collapsed, dumping a kicking Marian unceremoniously on the floor.

She floundered around for a moment, the clambered to her (four!) feet, clutching the sheet to her torso.

"Why on *earth* did you put me on that flimsy table!" she exclaimed. She paused, looking around in confusion. "And how did I get here? And where are my *clothes?!*"

There was a confused gabble of explanation, from which Marian managed to extract a few pertinent facts.

"Wait a moment, you mean I was *human* again for a while?"

"Actually, you have *always* been human," said San Savant.

"Don't get picky, you know what I mean." She turned to look at her friends, in the room and clustered in the hall. Despite the circumstances, she felt good knowing that there were that many people who cared for her.

"I have told you before, being stuck as a centaur was most likely caused by the incomplete integration

Chris Grant. Quote from Ed Strickland—"I've long had a malicious dream of having a special bumper sticker made up saying 'I steal parking spaces from the handicapped.' The idea is to plaster one neatly across the middle of the driver's side windshield on a violator's car."

of your Gift," San Savant explained. "Through these past months, that situation has been slowly improving. The physical trauma you have recently undergone was the final stimulus needed to complete the integration."

"Then why am I still part horse?"

"Because you awoke expecting to be."

Marian looked at him doubtfully.

"You mean that all I have to do is will it, and I'll change back to normal?"

"Most likely."

Marian looked from San Savant down at herself, then to the crowd outside. Her friends all knew how much she wanted this and were rooting for her. That was all the encouragement she needed. Marian closed her eyes, and pictured herself as she had been before the Gifting. It was hard to remember her old appearance; she concentrated for several seconds before the image seemed to suddenly lock in. There was a strange feeling throughout her body, a sort of tingling. Then she opened her eyes with a yell, as she started to fall.

Kid Power, in front because he was shortest, caught her, followed closely by Adamant. A cheer went up. Dizzy, Marian looked down at the two very human feet peeping out from under the sheet. She gave a weak smile, swaying, then turned to Adamant.

"Watch your hands," she muttered, still smiling.

"So it's over," said Paul. He took anther drink of coffee, then looked around the conference room at the Gifted and normals there.

"There have been no signs of any additional vampires since Marian killed that one two days ago," San Savant told him. "Since they can't exist for longer than a day without life energy, this means they are all dead."

"And the hole is sealed," the Wizard added, in review. "San Savant and I, with several other magically-talented Gifted, have established a system of mystic alarms which will alert us if another such breach occurs at any place on the globe."

"Good. Now, how is Marian doing?"

"Quite well, though somewhat disappointed," San Savant told Paul. "She can only maintain human form for a few hours at a time, then reverts to a centaur. I believe that this will improve with practice."

"So we have a happy ending all around," Red observed.

"For the most part." San Savant took a swallow of his own coffee, then frowned into the cup, as if seeing something distasteful in the brown liquid. "Most people now realize that the vampires were not our fault, and applaud us for our efforts in destroying them. The Center as a group, and several Gifted as individuals, have received commendations from the Governor of Kentucky and the Mayor of Louisville. There are still a few who believe the Gifted were behind the problem."

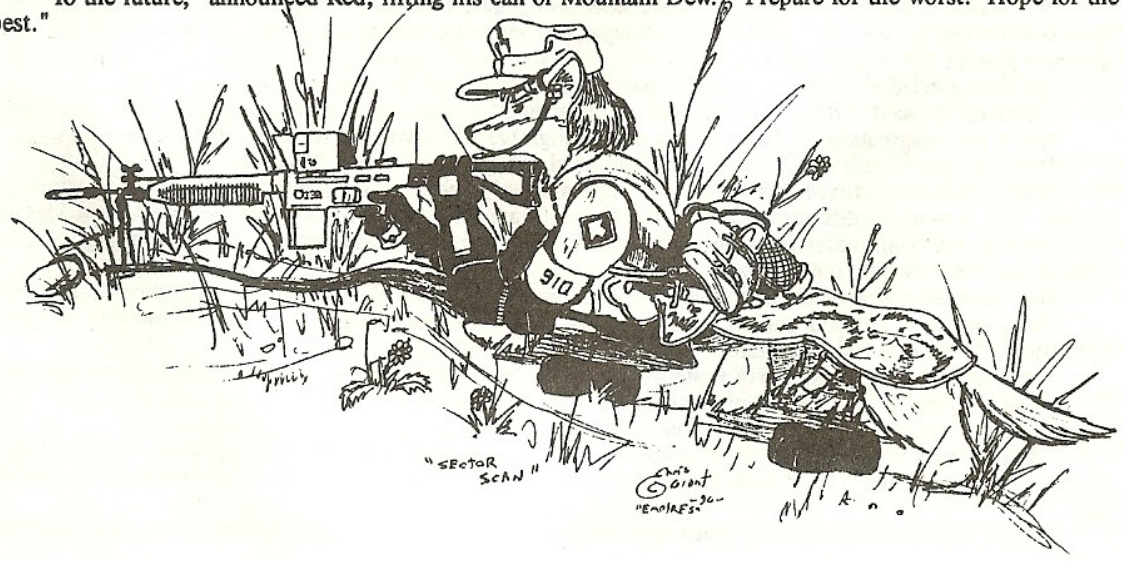
"We don't *need* 'em," growled Ranger.

"Be that as it may, we still must make every effort, not only to behave in a law-abiding manner ourselves, but to help the authorities deal with those Gifted who abuse their Gifts," San Savant told him. "Otherwise, we could find ourselves the subject of a pogrom."

"Never happen," declared Flow, firmly. "Not in *this* country."

"It *has* happened in this country," Sturdy told her quietly.

"To the future," announced Red, lifting his can of Mountain Dew. "Prepare for the worst. Hope for the best."



Scott Ruggels—"Being in California, the locals seem to take a dim view of the rest of the country for supporting the war...luckily the protesters seem disorganized, and a little rootless—so far."

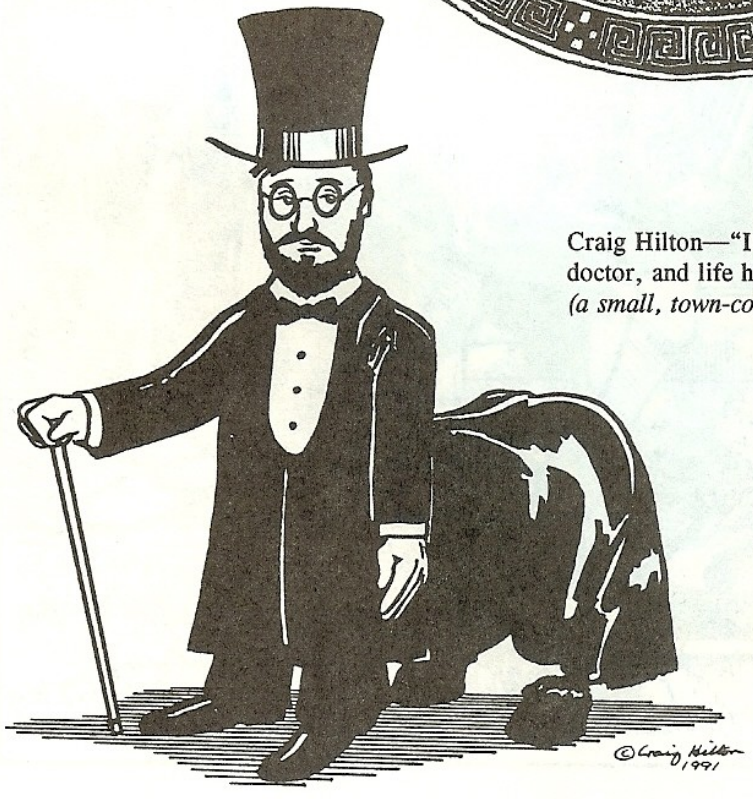
Derryl L. Munro—(Quote From the Bizarre Wars) "So what's going on!? I'm cooped up working for a few months...Okay, so it's been five! But still! What am I? OFF everyone's mailing lists?"

All here © D.L. Munro

-Derryl L. Munro - 90

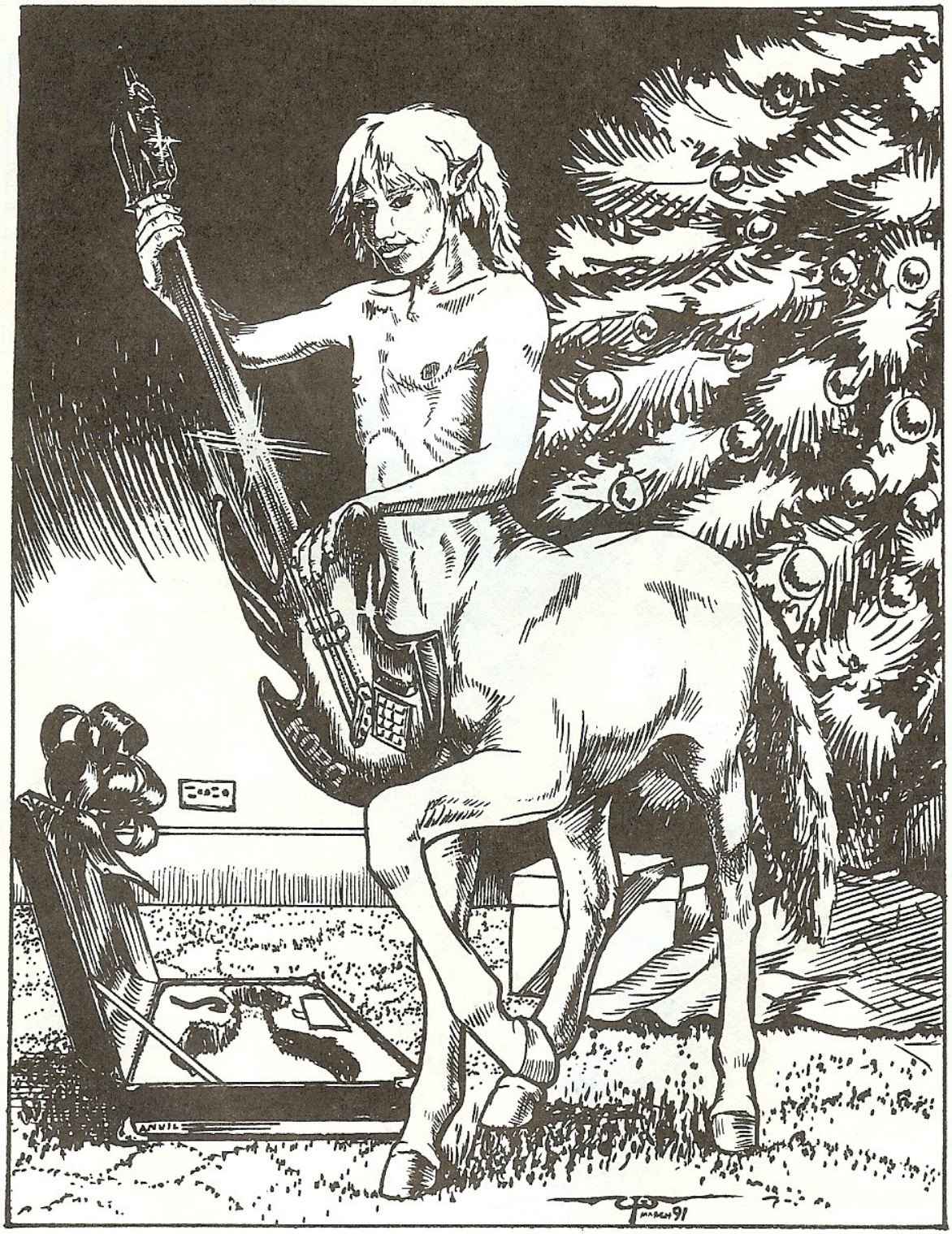
Bob Stein—"This is an illustration for a short story I'm working on—an archæology student finds out that Circe is more than just a myth. I've tried to match the style of ancient Greek art. Have any interest in story submissions?"

Craig Hilton—"I'm now a small-town country doctor, and life has never been better."
(a small, town-country doctor? -vw)



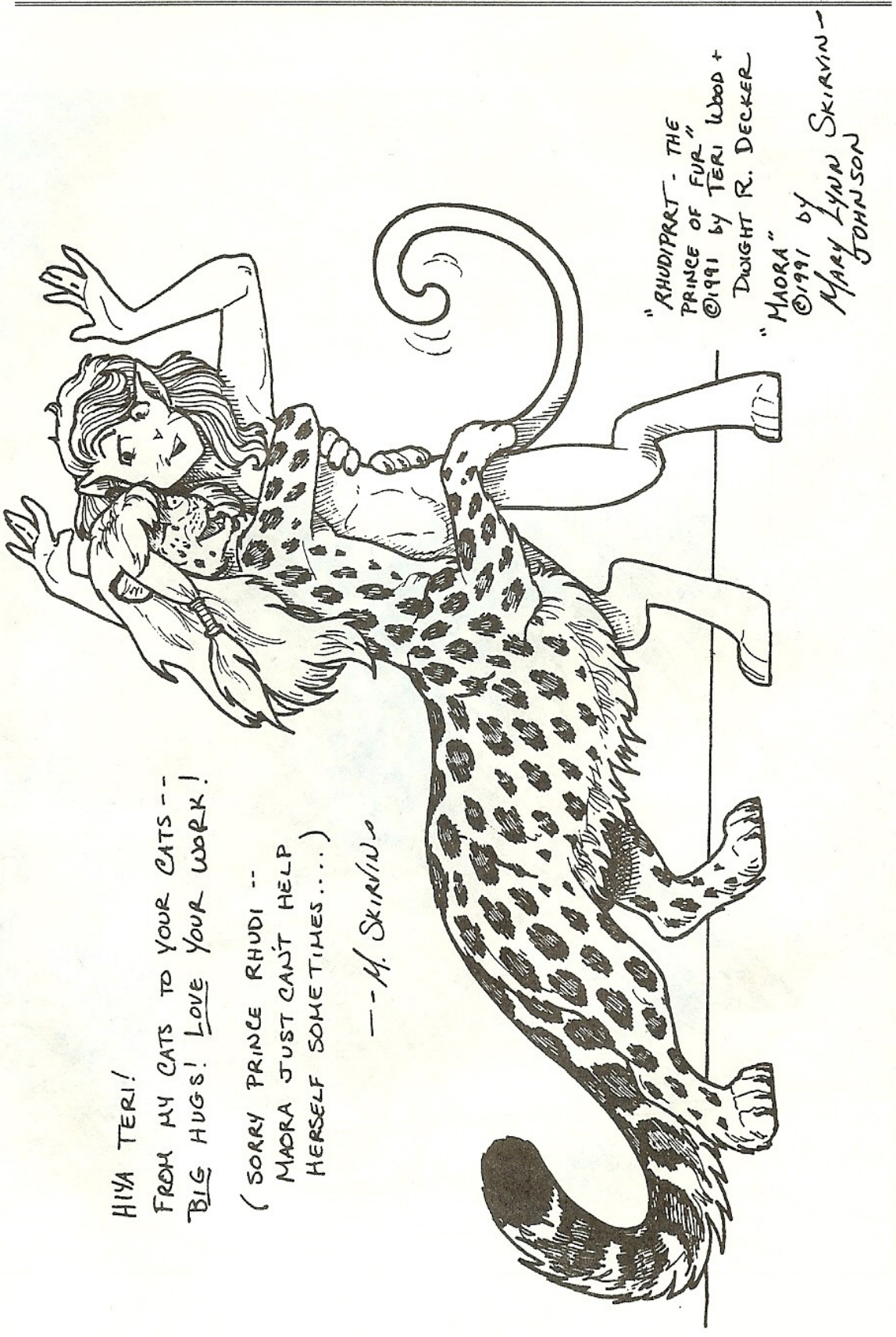
Fantasy imitates art

Victor Wren—This is from the Phillip X story, which so far exists only as a concept and a few illustrations. This picture shows is from Christmas, when he is 13, getting his first 'real' instrument. Cordless, of course.



Paige Easley—"Most people who come to SCAD are the usual semi-talented people who are otherwise too strange to fit in anywyhere else. A sense of humor is a necessary character in survival here."

Mary Lynn Skirvin Johnson—"Getting away from Barr Warrs allowed me to experiment with broader interpretations of other characters. It's been very refreshing."


"RHUDIPRAT - THE PRINCE OF FUR" ©1991 by TERI WOOD + DWIGHT R. DECKER
"MAORA" ©1991 by MARY LYNN SKIRVIN-JOHNSON
HIYA TERI!
FROM MY CATS TO YOUR CATS--
BIG HUGS! LOVE YOUR WORK!
(SORRY PRINCE RHUDI --
MAORA JUST CAN'T HELP
HERSELF SOMETIMES....)
--M. SKIRVIN

Scott Ruggels—"...*Red Shetland* #3...I inked over Terrie Smith's pencils. Indirectly, if it had not been for you, this never would have happened. Jim (Groat) spotted (Terrie) as a potential penciller. I had known Jim previously to this, but until I was slated to ink Terrie, I was only going to do issue 10 of *Equine*....So it all wrapped happily, and we have you to thank indirectly. Thank you." (*I know Ed well enough to say that this is exactly the sort of thing he works towards. He loves it when his friends make good. -vw*)

...ED'S A GOOD HOST, AND THERE'S NICE PRINTING, SO THERE REALLY ISN'T ANY GOOD REASON FOR YOU TO FEEL SO NERVOUS. RELAX! ENJOY THE COMPANY. JUS' CHILL.
THAT'S IT BOSS, JUST KEEP TALKING AND IT'S MEAT FOR DINNER!
WELCOME TO THE SHOW, TOM!
Ruggels 91

RUGGELS, A JAGGIR, COMBATCAT©1991 RUGGELS CAT CENTAUR©1991 TOM VERRÉ.

© Hopkins 90

Mary Lynn S. Johnson—"I am trying to learn wood carving so that I can carve a carousel centaur life-sized. I don't have all the tools yet, but I'm attending a class on carousel carving so that I can learn how to use the tools. I might try a snowcat, but I haven't gotten to the blueprint phase yet. I hope I make it through. It's one of the biggest things I've ever undertaken to do."

SPOT + MAORA
©1991 by M. SKIRVIN~
DATAUR
©1991 by
MELODY RONDEAU

HAPPY BIRTHDAY SPOT! HE RECENTLY PASSED HIS SECOND BIRTHDAY, SO I THOUGHT WE'D TRY THINKING UP NEAT STUFF TO GET HIM AS PRESENTS. GOT ANY IDEAS?

Terrie Smith—"Indigo sounds like a lovely girl! How did a Golden Retriever come to be named Indigo?" (*Ed, a major Peter Gabriel fan, named her after the song by that name on the second solo album. Then again, I lie a lot. -vw*)

Quinton Hoover—"I've come up with two titles for the overhead shot; 'The Snipe Hunt,' or 'Those Fearsome Frog Giggers.' The 'John Henry' centaur has been planned for a long time, but it always takes me some time to work up enough guts to start one of these zillion-little-dots thingies."

David Rust—"As of 9:00 P.M. on Monday, March 18, I have graduated! It was a foggy, wet night, and the last session of Intermediate Fiction Writing had finally let out."

The tale of the young nomadic centaur (Caflenal) Joshuwain started in a role-playing game but quickly grew to find a place in my stories. Now, with his brother, Phantos, and his brother's friend, Carnam, he continues his journeys both in the lands of Induria and his own soul.

Phantos had travelled for many years apart from his tribe, during which time, he mastered the ancient Arenkhar sword-art. One of the few remaining people who have mastered the blade skill, Phantos has been training his younger brother in the proficiency. Although Joshuwain didn't initially realize it, Phantos cares deeply for him and has taken him under his wing to help him grow up and become more of an adult. It was under an agreement with the caflenals' father that Phantos would help the alcoholic Joshuwain to make something of himself.

Carnam is a wolfwere from the trade empire of Ranakan. He is of the breed of wolfwere, one of the two ruling peoples of the empire. His ability to shape shift into a large grey wolf has proven helpful in the past, but not as much as his gift of sorcery. As the practice of magic is illegal in most of the civilized lands, the revelation of his talent required Joshuwain to overcome his prejudice and respect Carnam for who he was.

Their story continues as the three travellers arrive in the arid province of Varn in the Indurian empire. Now hundreds of miles from his native home, the young Joshuwain now feels the thrill of adventure and is dreaming, albeit unrealistically, of the times to come. For adventure is not dragons and relligar, *but the triumph of the spirit in the face of adversity.*

Fire Fish

by David J. Rust

Joshuwain turned to face his brother. His red, irritated eyes and pained expression showed his extreme discomfort. The heat was all but unbearable, and his eyes stung with salty sweat. In vain, he wiped away the perspiration on his brow only to have more form after seconds in the hot, dry air. His lungs heaved in protest to draw the scalding air into his tanned body. The layers of his rich, brown hair on his lower body were matted, sticking to him in dirty clumps. His eyes were red from constant rubbing and his breaths came irregularly as he tried to talk.

"Phan...this is killing...me. I can't...*breathe*." Joshuwain's voice cracked as he spoke.

Phantos Greydawn shook his head with a slight smile and patted his younger brother on the shoulder. Turning to their travelling companion Carnam Devashal, Phantos tried not to laugh. "Well, Joshuwain, you *did* say that you wanted to visit a large city and see how the Eibecaras lived. I did warn you about the smell, though."

Joshuwain looked around the tight, crowded streets of wooden and clay buildings. People representing nearly every race of the Indurian Empire filled the narrow alleys and main streets dressed in light, voluminous clothing for the dry heat. Tents and multi-colored pavilions stood in sandy lots between the permanent buildings as temporary shops for the travelling merchants arriving by sea or across the flat lowlands to the West. Off to the North and East, a narrow smudge on the horizon acted as reminder of the Southern-most arm of the Indurian Mountain Range which branched to form two frontiers of this desert province of Induria called Varn.

People of all kinds filled the capitol's streets, talking, arguing, dealing, running, walking, and shouting as far as could be seen. Humans, wolfweres, reptilians...many of them merchants...were all here to sell their goods in the biggest Northern port city on the Stormdark Sea.

A small retinue of servant-boys ran to keep up with the broad steps of a reptilian trader covered head to tail in white robes. Only a broad, many-toothed snout could be seen sticking out from under the white hood. Carnam had called them 'high merchants,' a powerful caste in the reptilian circles of the Ranakan Empire. The servant-boys constantly kept the merchant's clothing damp with water that they carried in large, ceramic urns. Further along the street, a stout woman shouted hoarsely into the crowd advertising her rare herbs and salts. Still more people of many races could be seen selling fish and spices, pottery and cloth, tools and jewelry, slaves and beasts, and every service imaginable.

To Joshuwain, many of the items and services were unknown and strange, leaving him quite taken aback when a tall, scantily-clad woman approached him, ran a hand enticingly along his flank, offering to show him a "part of the city most stallions never see." She had been rather persistent, and Phantos had to step in and explain that Joshuwain had only just arrived and had neither time nor money for a personal "tour" just yet. Joshuwain merely blushed as the prostitute smiled seductively and left. Joshuwain had never experienced so many sights and sounds in one place before. It was very unsettling.

What made it worse was the smell. Phantos and Carnam had told Josh that all large cities were like this and many of them even worse. Joshuwain, having only lived in the nomadic environs of Teruvor, found all this confusing activity and unyielding stench somewhat frightening. But Phantos was right, he had asked to see such a non-nomad city in all its unwholesome reality, so he'd better learn to take it like a stallion.

But, if this was how the Eibecaras—or non-nomads—lived, he didn't want to see much more.

David Rust—"What do you suppose the attraction to centaurs is? I've thought about this often in the past few years and I can only assume that, for myself, I wish that I were one. Probably, it is what I associate with centaurs that is responsible for my attitude; Strength, honor, physical perfection, an absence of asthma... Boy would I love to run like a horse without wheezing and coughing."

How those two-leggers could live in such conditions was beyond him.

Through clenched teeth, Joshuwain tried to manage a question that he hoped didn't sound too leading. "Phan, in a city this crowded and with so many humans, where are we going to find lodging? I haven't seen any Caflenal about or places that would have big enough rooms."

Phantos kept smiling. "Don't worry, I've been here before. There are several places with large enough accommodations for us. Remember, the larger breeds of Caflenal travel further abroad and more frequently than our people in Teruvor. Many of the inns near the East gates or the docks have bigger rooms for travellers like us."

Joshuwain's horse-like ears relaxed alongside his dark brown hair. His eyes pretended to study the paving stones as he forced his legs to keep their pace. Phantos detected his brother's poorly hidden disappointment and patted him on the shoulder. "Not standing in lead shoes already, are you?"

Joshuwain sighed and held his nose. "No, I just don't think I could live in this place for very long and work at the same time."

"Well, I'll try to find us a job that takes us away from the city more often, then. I hear they need lifters and haulers on the spice flats."

The thought of the arid flat-land to the West through which they'd travelled almost ten scalding days, was enough to make Joshuwain wince. "No thanks, Phan. I'd rather be employed eating rocks."

Carnam tapped Joshuwain on his flank. "Why don't you and I get some rooms and then look around the market square while Phantos tries to find some decent work for three hard-pressed travellers." Turning to Phantos he added, "And try to avoid any jobs like that one in Pyrdinol...I was picking burrs outta my clothes for months."

Phantos laughed and nodded, leaving Joshuwain feeling a bit left out of the private joke. So much had happened between Phan and Carnam, that Joshuwain regretted the time he'd wasted while he had been at home. He also envied the relationship between Carnam and his brother. But Phantos was not only a brother, he was Joshuwain's best friend. Sometimes, he had been Joshuwain's only friend but when Carnam and Phan would talk about their adventures, Joshuwain felt excluded.

All that Phan would usually say was "It's better to not be envious of some of the things we've done—I'd rather not remember some of them myself."

Unfortunately, that did nothing to quell this new desire for adventure growing within Joshuwain's chest. Over the last eight months since they had left the Shoreward State of Errom-Dal and moved South, Joshuwain's outlook had been gradually changing. No longer was he the frightened young colt being forced to "grow up" in the face of disinheritance; he was growing more sure of himself everyday. He wanted the change and the challenge, and hearing about his brother's adventures only fueled his feelings.

"I'll meet the two of you around sunset at the Watchful Lion Inn. Keep out of too much trouble, and no ale yet, Josh."

Joshuwain nodded solemnly. He hadn't had a drink in months, but if Phan suggested it, he could wait.

As Phantos turned and trotted down a cross-street, Josh and Carnam moved slowly through the sweaty crowd towards the central districts of the sweltering city.

Joshuwain slowly pushed his way through the packed tavern of the Watchful Lion Inn and looked around for a table. Being shortly after noon, the tavern was filled with market patrons and merchants alike. Nearby, some tall, scaly reptilians discussed a shipping deal for rare woods with squat and serious dwarves bearing the trade symbol of the distant Stormshield Mountains. A trio of tall men sat along the tavern's wide-open windows examining large parchments on which were detailed ship designs. A few comely young women, apparently working for the inn, were carrying large wicker baskets as they left to go into the main market square. The quick and lively music of a travelling minstrel added an exotic feel to the vast menagerie of races packed into the high-roofed Inn.

Joshuwain smiled and shook his head. Everything was so rushed and busy. This was nothing like the trade cities on the fringes of Teruvor. Even Doonrab wasn't as restless as this place, and that city had to deal with dozens of nomadic tribesmen, Shoreward States merchants, Timberlands elves, and Cambronian traders at all times during the year.

There didn't seem to be any Caflenal present, but several large tables and raised portions of the bar were testament to their occasional visits. It seemed that the long, trestle-like bar was the only place in the tavern where there was open space. Carnam had gone to speak to the inn-keeper about rooms for the three of them and to settle payments for at least a week. If Phantos couldn't find work for them by then, it was a pretty good bet that they should probably move on. Even so, according to both Carnam and Phantos, not finding work in Varn was almost as impossible as not finding a wolfwere in Ranakan.

Joshuwain moved slowly between the packed tables up to the long, raised bar. A pair of powerfully built and white robed reptilians sat on stools at the bar talking in a hissing dialect of the Ranakan trade tongue. Careful not to step on their thick, plated tails, Joshuwain settled down next to them and rested his elbow on a stool for Carnam.

David Rust—"It seems that the entire CGN group is like an extended family, and I hope I can become a bit closer to several of its members. I'd like to talk to as many people as I can; in a way, expand my friends across the nation."

Over the past eight months, Carnam had taught Joshuwain much of the wide-spread trade tongue and told him about places where that language was spoken. It had been explained to Joshuwain that most serious travellers spoke at least three languages and usually four. The most common choices were the Trade Language, Common Indurian, and Common Rygaran most of which Joshuwain had been exposed to in his travels through Induria.

Joshuwain looked towards the front entrance in time to see Carnam enter and start across the crowded floor of the tavern. Joshuwain was about to call out a "hello" to his friend when a sharp jab of an elbow caught his attention.

"Ssso, young Cafflenal, are you new here?"

The rough, hissing voice startled Joshuwain and he quickly turned to face the speaker. One of the two large reptilians was facing him, its long, tooth-filled snout only inches from Josh's face. Joshuwain started in surprise and tried to translate what had been said to him. "Uh, um..."

Frantically, Joshuwain searched for the right words.

"It isss alright...take your time." The creature's greenish scales glinted in the indoor light and seemed to reflect a hint of gold. Its yellow eyes gleamed with an inner fire as they watched Joshuwain. Occasionally, a flicker of a tongue would appear from its snout.

Joshuwain blushed at having been so easily flustered and calmed himself. "Er, yeah. I'm new here—just came into town looking for work."

The reptilian nodded with a toothy smile. "Thought ssso. I wasss jussst telling my companion that you looked like a Northerner...probably never been Sssouth before."

Josh nodded. "Yes," he said hesitantly, "I've spent most my life in Teruvor." He wasn't sure about these two...he'd never met a reptilian up close before. Their saurian features were too different to pick up subtle clues about what they were thinking.

The two reptilians nodded. "Indeed? If you want to hear about a possssible job, perhapsss you'd care to join usss at sssupper? We've ordered sssome fire fish...very tasssty."

The way the lizard man lingered over the word "tasty", made Joshuwain hope the stranger's diet was purely aquatic. Carnam's voice to Josh's right startled him.

"Well, Joshuwain, meeting people already?" Carnam strolled up to the group and climbed onto the reserved stool.

The second reptilian addressed Carnam with a nod and a toothy attempt at a smile. "Are you a companion of the Cafflenal? If ssso, you're welcome to join usss. We were about to dissscusss a work propossition over sssupper."

"Yesss," added the other, "plenty of fire fish for all—your friend wasss about to try sssome."

Carnam adopted a half-smile. "Fire fish? Now there's a dish I haven't had in a long while. They serve it here, do they?"

Joshuwain looked at the two lizard men. "Actually, I'm not very fond of fish but..."

"He'll make an exception this time, won't you Joshuwain?"

Josh looked at Carnam and back to the others at his left. Great.

Joshuwain managed an insincere grin and nodded. "Sure. I can always make an exception."

The first reptilian smiled. "Excellent...Joshuwain. You may call me Sssarrin. My companion isss Rellasss." He looked past Joshuwain at Carnam. "And you, wolfwere?"

"The name's Carnam," he answered, "but I think I'll pass up the supper—the spices in fire fish sit hard in my stomach. My friend'll have to enjoy my share for me."

Joshuwain looked at Carnam with daggers in his gaze. 'Thanks a lot Carnam,' he thought.

The other reptilian called in a loud voice to get the attention of the tavern-keeper. "Mikaleusss! Another two platesss of the fish!"

Joshuwain examined the wood grain in the bar as the two reptilians talked to each other rapidly in their native dialect. What had he gotten himself into? For a simple meal, the air of expectation between the two reptilians and Carnam made it feel like an eating contest. It was if some game was being played and Joshuwain was the playing piece. Hopefully this was nothing that he'd regret. He was probably a little too tense.

"Hey, Josh." Carnam was leaning over to the seated Caflenal's pointed ear. "Just remember, you're trying to make friends in this city. These guys are major traders—you can tell by their white robes and tail plates. If we get in good with them, we might be able to get a high-paying warehouse job."

Joshuwain swallowed and nodded. That explained it. Okay, so all he was expected to do was get in good with these two and hopefully, get a decent job. It didn't sound too hard. Joshuwain had always been able to come across as personable if he had to make an impression...and there were many fillies who could attest to that.

After a few minutes, the heavyset tavern-keeper came in from the outdoor cook fires with four oval, pewter bowls wreathed in thick, white steam. With a click of metal on wood he set down the platters; one each before Sarrin and Rellas and two in front of Josh. The Caflenal took a deep breath over the steaming bowl. A powerful burning assaulted his nostrils and he had to force himself not to recoil. In

Dave Riethmeier—"Sorry this questionnaire is late. I wanted to send some money along with it and people keep telling me that car payments, insurance and credit card bills are more important than art. What a concept."

that instant the other smells of the city were forgotten.

The fish were sitting in a thick, brown sauce that bubbled with roughly chopped onions, peppers, scallions, temas, and other ingredients that Joshuwain couldn't recognize. The smell was so strong that Josh was positive his nose had been damaged for life.

While his two hosts paid the tavern keeper, Joshuwain leaned over to talk to his companion. Carnam was calmly sipping an ale and looked up innocently at Josh's whispered voice.

"Alright, wolfwere," Josh said in his native plains-speak, "if the air outside doesn't kill me, this food will! What do expect me to do?"

Carnam finished a sip of ale and looked seriously at his companion. "Do your best, Joshuwain. That's all I ask—your best."

"Problemsss Cafflenal?"

Joshuwain turned at Sarrin's voice.

"No, no. Just...talking with my friend." Josh paused. The traders looked skeptical. "A lot of fish too. Of course, to fill a stomach like mine, I'll need a lot."

Sarrin nodded with a toothy smile and began to eat.

Joshuwain looked at his plates. The fish broth had stopped boiling, but that didn't raise his expectations. Sighing in resignation, he stabbed some of the fire fish with a two-pronged fork and stared at it. After stirring the fish around in the broth, he put a small bit in his mouth. The hot spice didn't even wait a second to make itself known. It burned.

It really burned.

The flavors were so hot, Joshuwain fancied that he could feel his tongue turning to embers. His eyes bulged and his face muscles began to twitch. It seemed as if everything else in the tavern faded to insignificance. The sounds, smells...everything paled in comparison to the burning in Joshuwain's mouth. His eyes watered as if smoke was in them and he knew it was only a matter of moments before he would be forced to either choke to death or pass out from the ordeal.

He forced himself to do neither.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the reptilians pause, watching him. Joshuwain's resolve tightened.

Locking his teeth, he forced the burning fish to the back of his mouth and swallowed. The burning sensation still lingered strongly on his tongue. Joshuwain glanced at his dining companions. They were still watching him.

Regretting his action already, he stabbed another piece of fish and popped it in his mouth with a forced smile. Again, he felt as if his head would burst into flames, but managed to force the mouthful down.

Slowly, he turned to his companions with a grin. "Yes...very good fish."

The two traders looked at each other, smiling their toothy grins. Joshuwain hoped that he'd made a good impression.

"Well, Cafflenal, you certainly are a rare find."

"Yesss," agreed Sarrin, "not many enjoy fire fish ssso much on the firssst try...you may have oursss."

Joshuwain froze the expression of false enjoyment on his face and looked down at the two extra bowls of fish that were added to his own.

With a scrape of a chair and a broad smile, Carnam got up and started for the back room. "Well, my friend—I'll leave you to your fish and new-found friends. I'm going to see if I can find a game of rings." With that, Carnam walked into the smoke-filled back room.

Joshuwain looked back at the fish and wondered if he could hit the back of Carnam's head with a few fillets. Deciding against it, he cut another piece and forced himself to swallow it. With a sigh that felt like it came from the fires of a forge, Joshuwain smiled once again at the traders, and continued to eat.

The passing moments seemed to stretch to eternity. Josh knew that only about an hour had passed, but it felt like thirty. By engaging in idle conversation over that period, he had managed to save his mouth from totally expiring, though he wondered whether or not he'd ever be able to taste anything but fire fish ever again. The problem was that the traders weren't much conversationalists, and over that time, he had been forced to devour three and a half bowls of fish without many intervening lapses.

Joshuwain sadly surveyed what remained. Two fillets of the burning dish were left and Joshuwain was feeling sick.

Sometime during the hour, Carnam had come back, apparently not finding a game to join. Now, he watched Joshuwain silently from his stool. That alone wouldn't have been so bad, but word had spread though the tavern about an "eating contest" of fire fish, and now almost every other patron stood nearby, watching Josh.

Joshuwain looked at the plate.

Only two fillets left...about four large bites.

Joseph Chaplin—"I'm trying to learn how one plays flute. So far just making strange sounds."

He couldn't do it. His stomach was threatening to rebel even at the thought of any more. Still, Carnam was right there, watching. And there were so many others. If he didn't go through with it, he'd fail in front of all of them...he'd fail in front of himself.

He prepared to give it his best. He nodded to Sarrin with a parched smile and looked back at the plate. Regretting his decision already, he skewered the entire two remaining fillets as one massive bite and shoved them in his mouth. Outwardly, he smiled as the bar patrons let out a rousing cheer. Inwardly, he felt the previously eaten fish trying to fight their way out of his stomach. He fought against queasiness and tried not to show it. He was slapped on the flanks by most of the adjacent customers and offered a drink by several. Sarrin and Rellas were hunched together, talking in their indecipherable dialect.

Carnam embraced Joshuwain heartily. "You did it, boy; congratulations!" Joshuwain only half-attempted a nod.

After a few moments, he smiled and got to his hooves. His body was sweatier than before and his insides felt queasy. His voice came out as a raspy wheeze as he bent to whisper to Carnam. "I think I'm going to stand...out back for a bit, Carnam." The wolfwere nodded with a huge smile as Joshuwain pushed through the cheering patrons and went through the back room towards the rear of the tavern.

Sarrin clasped a hand on Carnam's shoulder. "Your friend hasss great ssstrength of will. Perhapsss you and he would like a job working in a dock warehoussse? We trade spicesss from Ranakan to the North."

"Sounds good to me." Carnam adopted a shrewd tone and appeared to consider the proposition. "Sleeping arrangements? Food? We'd also need room for Joshuwain's brother—he's even bigger and has a large appetite, but you know he'd work hard." Carnam waited as the two discussed his counter proposal.

Sarrin held out his clawed hand. "There isss no problem with food and lodging." He paused. "But I would like to ssspeak again with Joshuwain. It wasss hisss ssstrength that convinced me."

Carnam laughed. "I think that may be a problem. He's just stepped out for a bit. I can assure you, however, that he does appreciate your terms." He took Sarrin's grip and shook hands.

After a few minutes, the commotion in the bar died down and the two reptilians rose to go. "We will ssse you at the Sssouth Pargasssusss docksss tomorrow midday, Carnam. Give our regardsss to your Cafflenal friend."

Carnam smiled and waved after the two as they left the Watchful Lion.

Phantos arrived at the tavern around dusk. He felt pretty good. He'd made several good contacts that would probably get them enough cash to continue on their travels after only a few months work. The jobs might even pay enough cash to get them to Stormport or Lastport, then he could really show Joshuwain a city. As he walked in, he spotted Carnam seated at the bar talking to a buxom, young woman.

Clearing his throat as he approached, Phantos caught Carnam's attention. Telling the young woman that he'd meet her later, the wolfwere turned to his Phantos.

"Well, Carnam. I've gotten us several good prospects for local work. Not the easiest, but better than I'd expected. I thought I'd give Josh a chance to make the choice, though."

"I don't think that'll be necessary, Phantos."

Phantos raised an eyebrow. "Why is that?"

Carnam sat back against the bar and retold the tale of Joshuwain and the fire fish.

"So, we all have jobs with a trade company down by the docks. Good pay, hearty work, and—thanks to your brother—employees who respect us. I'd say Josh has done well."

Phantos shook his head in disbelief. "I never would have thought that Josh would go through something like that; he hates any kind of 'playing games' or 'not being myself.' Did you goad him into that?"

"Only at first. He did the rest by himself. I think he just did it because he felt that he had to."

"Where is he? I should really congratulate him."

Carnam jerked his thumb towards the back. "He's out in the ally where he's been most of the afternoon."

Phantos looked confused.

Carnam continued. "You see, after all that spice, your brother needed a drink and..."

"You didn't let him have any ale did you?" Phantos began to look angry and concerned at the same time.

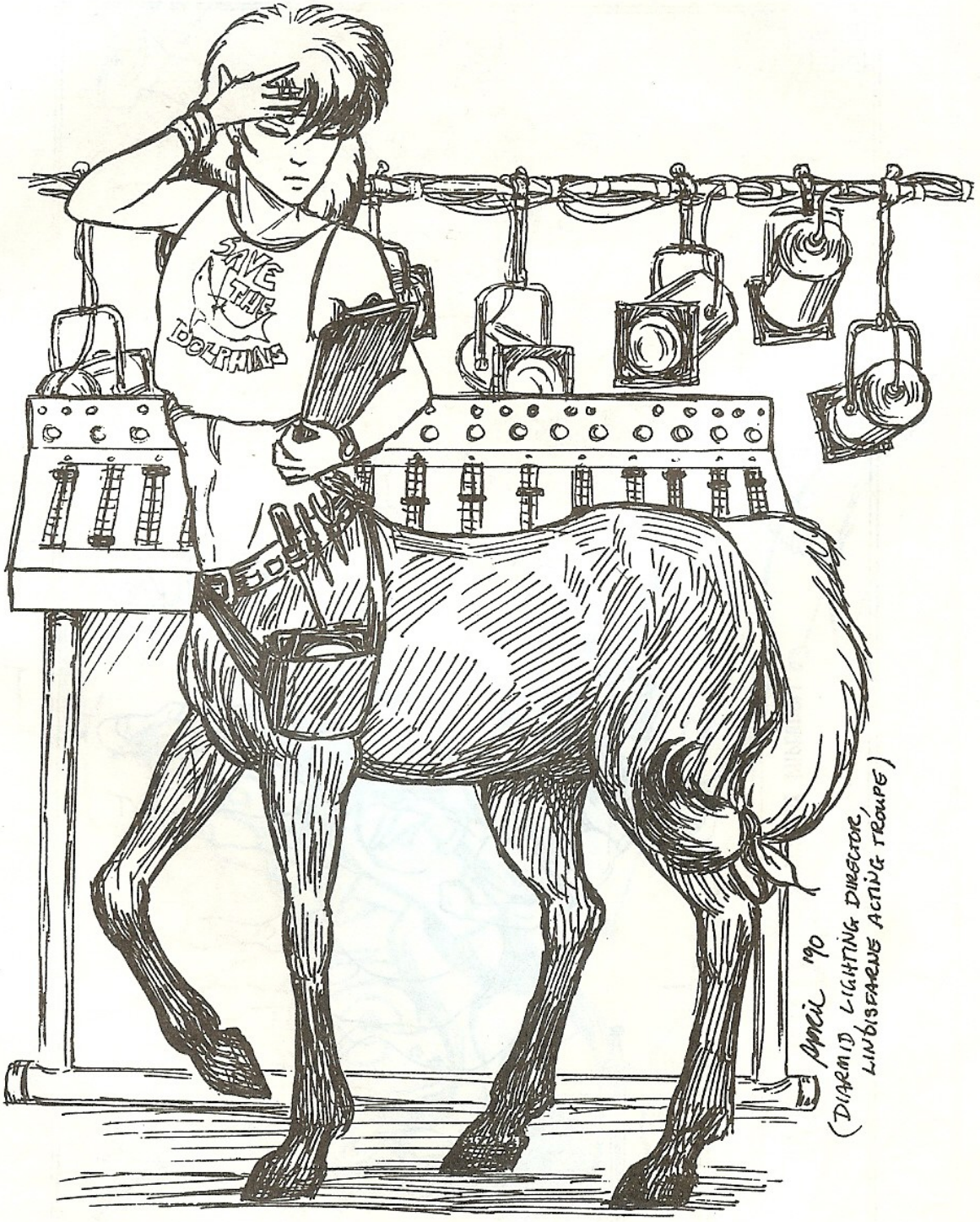
"No, I didn't. Don't worry. As a matter of fact, I didn't even have to remind him. Your brother turned down at least a dozen drinks after he downed all four bowls of fish."

Phantos' face relaxed, but still looked puzzled. "Then what's he...?"

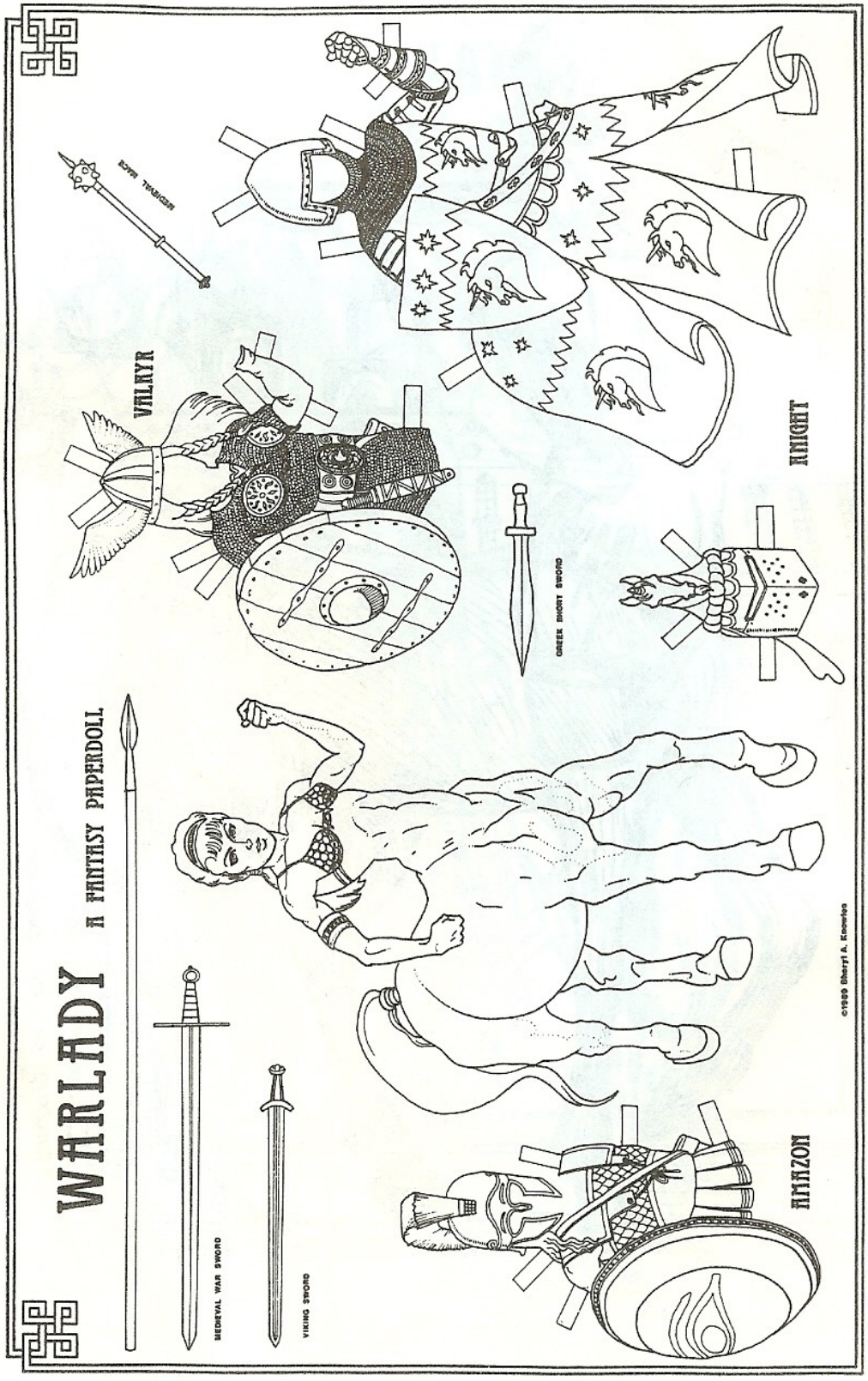
"Water. He's still got his head in the alley's fire barrel."

April Lee—"Will you be at Chicon (Worldcon) this year? [*yes! I will be there Wednesday, Ed will arrive at 00:01 on Friday*] It seems as if everybody I know will be going there. I'm really looking forward to it—it'll be a crazy time, I'm sure!"

April Lee—"...Not being a fan of authoritarianism in any form I rather felt like NOTHING should be 'required' reading, no matter what it was. 'Suggested' would have made me feel better..." *(You weren't alone—see page 5 -vw)*



Sheryl A. Knowles—"I've got quite a list of 'wannados' but yours is the first suggestion I've ever had for a vampire! I do have a preliminary sketch for an undead-skeleton paper doll...The paper dolls sell for $6.00 an 11" by 17" page. Includes postage & packaging *[note: this was pre rate increase, so write first to be certain. -vw]"*

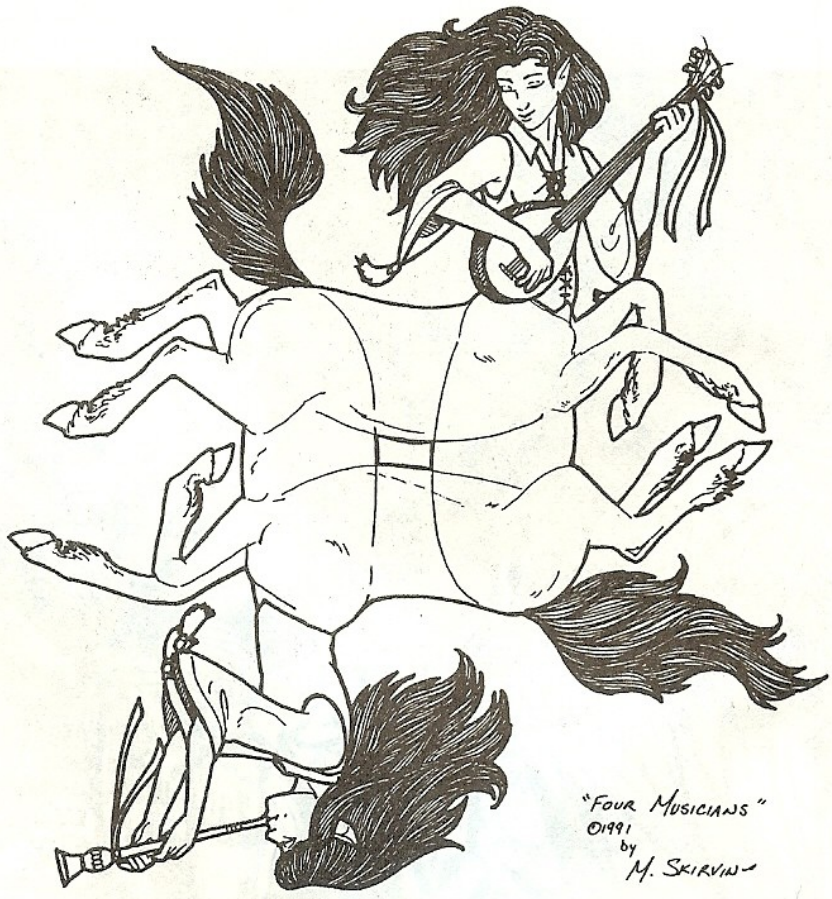


Jack Cavenaugh—"There are a lot of people out there who really like this type of artwork, but they are afraid to admit it. People after work come up to me and ask to see my stuff. They usually make some real neat comments about the stuff, but when they are around their buddies, they like to make fun of my drawings. I guess that is what you call a 'closet furry art lover.'"

Terrie Smith—"Here is a copy of 'Summer Heat' for you—I saved you the last one! I sent you one before, but it seems the Postal Worms have devoured it." *(The picture below is not 'Summer Heat'* -vw)

David P. Cannon—"Just a short stubby note, no weirdness or roto-rooter shock-troop stories, or sponge puns, or my abilities to stand with the cows in a pasture and help them chip at our ozone or mention that fritos look like modern earrings, or that the next person that beats you drag racing might be that little blue-haired old lady, or that grasshoppers aren't really crunchy until fried, or that I scream upon contact with fire. Just no weird stuff. Nope. Ta. Stay away from electric toilet paper dispensers."

Top: Mary Lynn Skirvin Johnson—"When Heather and I get our acts on the same wavelength, we're going to try some art collaborations. Could be lots of fun. I really like her water colors."
Bottom: Derryl L. Munro—"Yes, it's a new year, and my first resolution is to keep up my contacts and correspondences with friends and warriors alike! As if BUSH wasn't enough!"



Natasha Dahlberg—"Several people saw my drawing that ya put in the last CG and they wrote me! I was so excited. Chris Dunn and S.—*(blank)* Minstrel also wrote me! Do you know what the S. stands for, or is it too atrocious to tell?" *(Yes. No. -vw)*

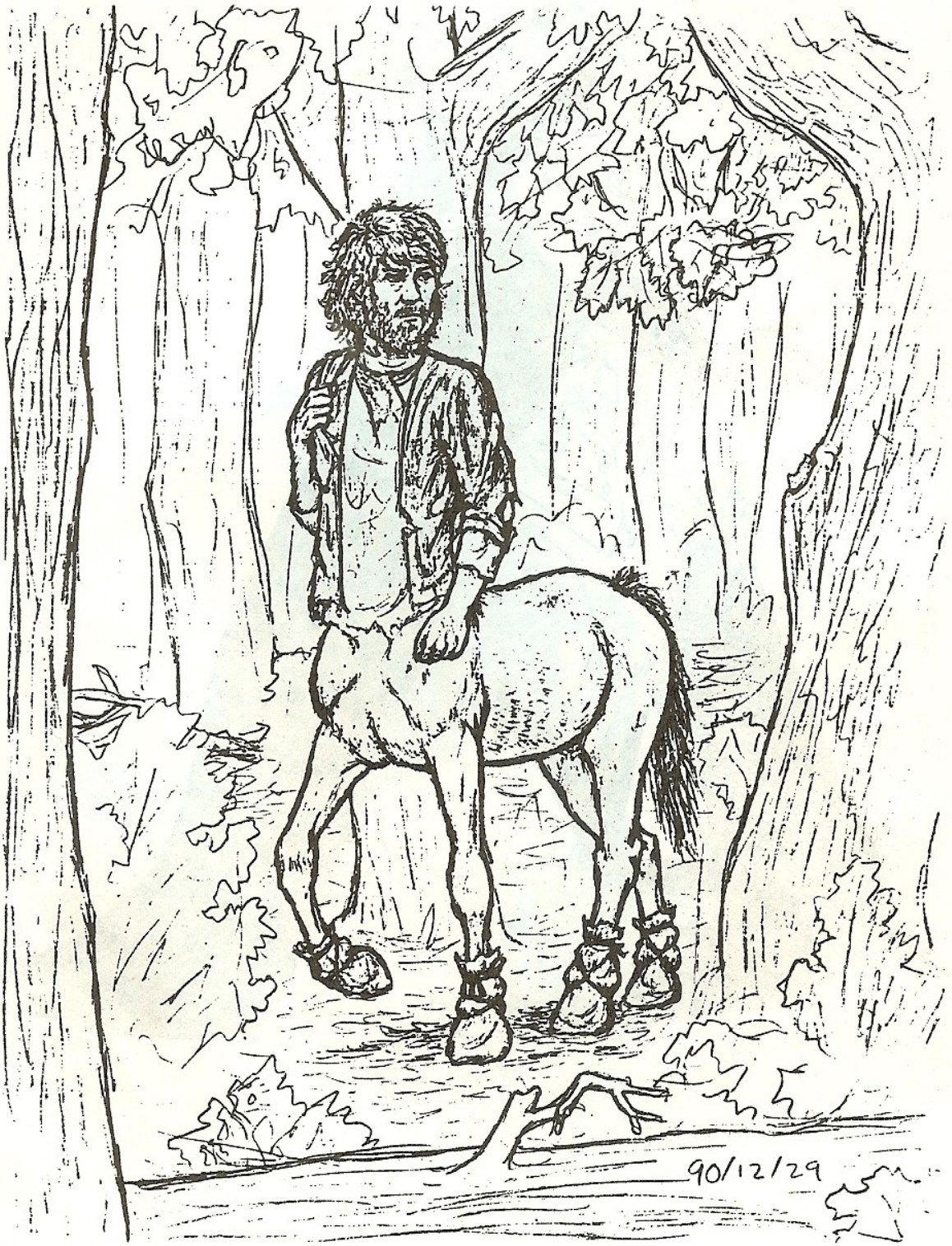
Mary Lynn Skirvin Johnson—"I concentrate on the character so that viewers can really 'see' them more intimately. This seems to have worked with 'Sao's Impatience' *(last issue, p. 32)*. That painting sold for $425. I didn't even get to hang it before someone bought it. I like that. A lot."

Paula Schricker—"I heard that the next CG will be a big one. When is it coming out?" *(Now. -vw)*

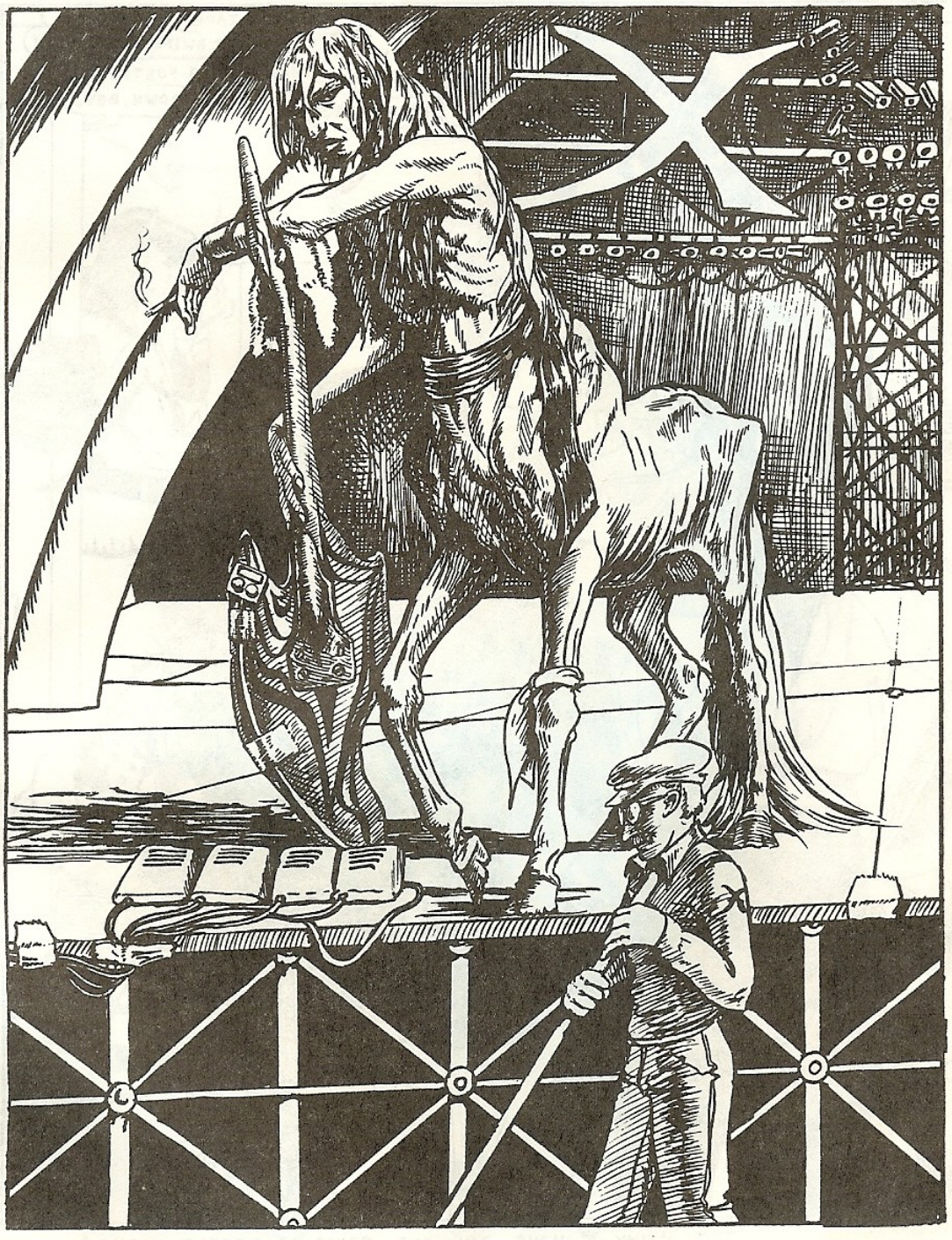
Michelle Parker. Quote from Cat Henley—"I've found yet another centaurphile (sigh!) Hope you like her stuff. Grrrrrr! I've been up too long partying with the Lunatic Fringe at Contex. Sherry, Panda and I ran into Joy Riddle who was busy converting a new Barr Warrior—hopefully one who's on *our* side!"

Michelle Parker. Quote from Mendy Hill—"About the puzzle. ⇒ How does he weigh 60 grams? Well, I would imagine with a scale. Sorry, I have to be a smartass. It's part of my job."

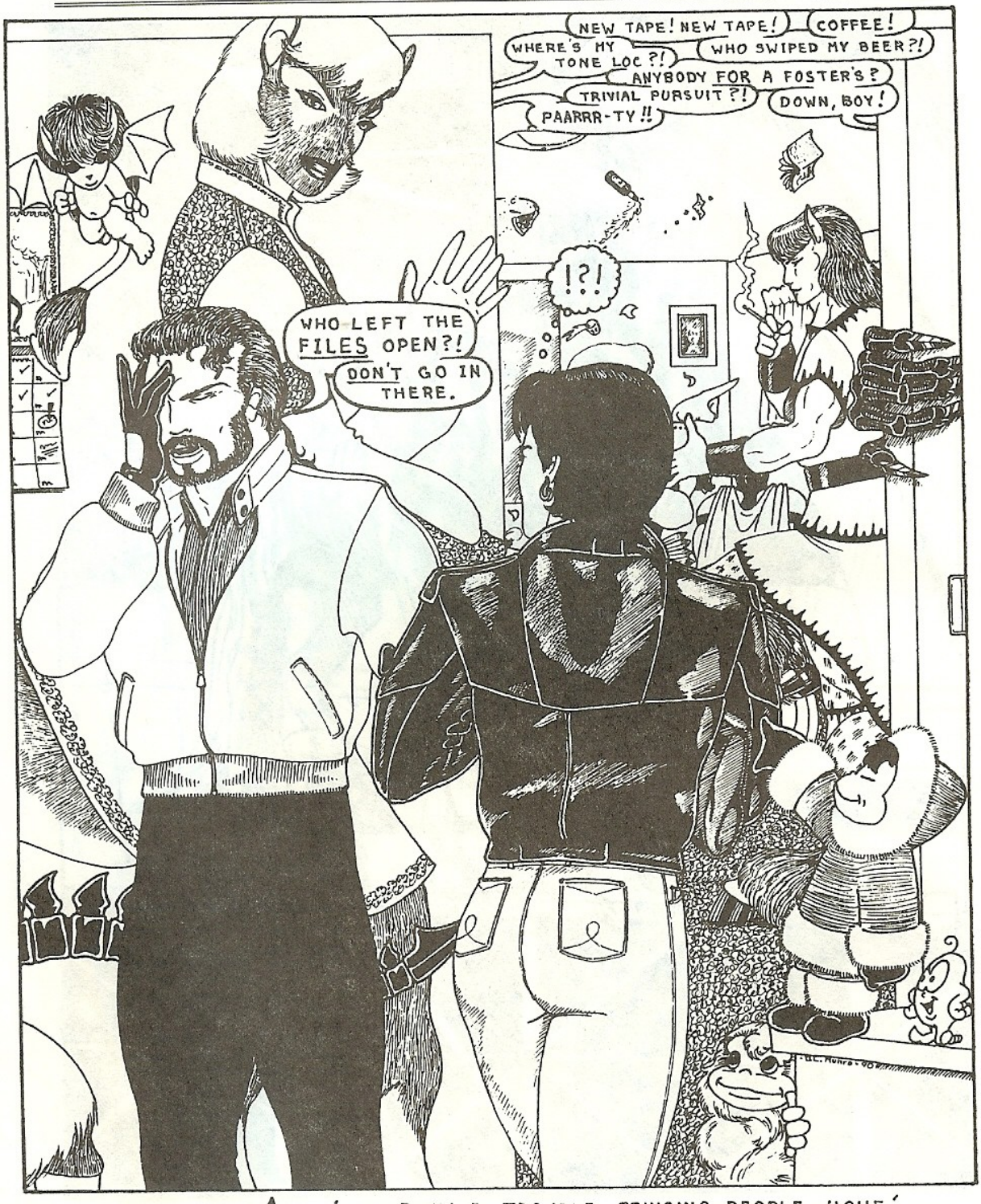
Peregrin—"A dark-eyed junco crashed into the glass today, and I was quite worried about it for awhile...It was about 3 or 4°C at the time...so I brought it inside in a shoe-box, and put it in the corner of my cupboard to recuperate. Maybe half an hour later, it made a break for the window. Taking this as a sign that it was getting better, I let it out. It seemed to have trouble using one leg and spent some time sitting, head down, in the sun, but when I grew worried again and opened the window to check on it, it hopped quickly under the railing to perch on the gutter. It vanished soon after; I think it is all right. Hope so."



Victor Wren—Phillip X has abused drugs, his body, and most importantly, his music, attempting to escape from the stress of the legal battles that will decide whether he is to be allowed any rights, including the right to life. The world comes apart soon after this Picture—a bad thing for billions, but about the best that could have happened to Phillip.



Derryl L. Munro—"Concerning the X-rated CGN and centaur erotica: It's gotten to the point these days that it seems to me what is considered high quality and what is considered erotica are two mutually exclusive areas, 'and never the twain shall meet' as they say." Margaret O'Connell—"Would Derryl Munro be interested in selling Christmas cards of his Scandinavian-looking Santa-centaur? I can think of at least four people I'd love to send it to next year."



'WHY I HAVE TROUBLE BRINGING PEOPLE HOME.'
(DO ANY OF YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM?)

The artist

All here © D.L.H. -90 (save the lady in the leather, her '©' goes to her parents, bless 'em.)

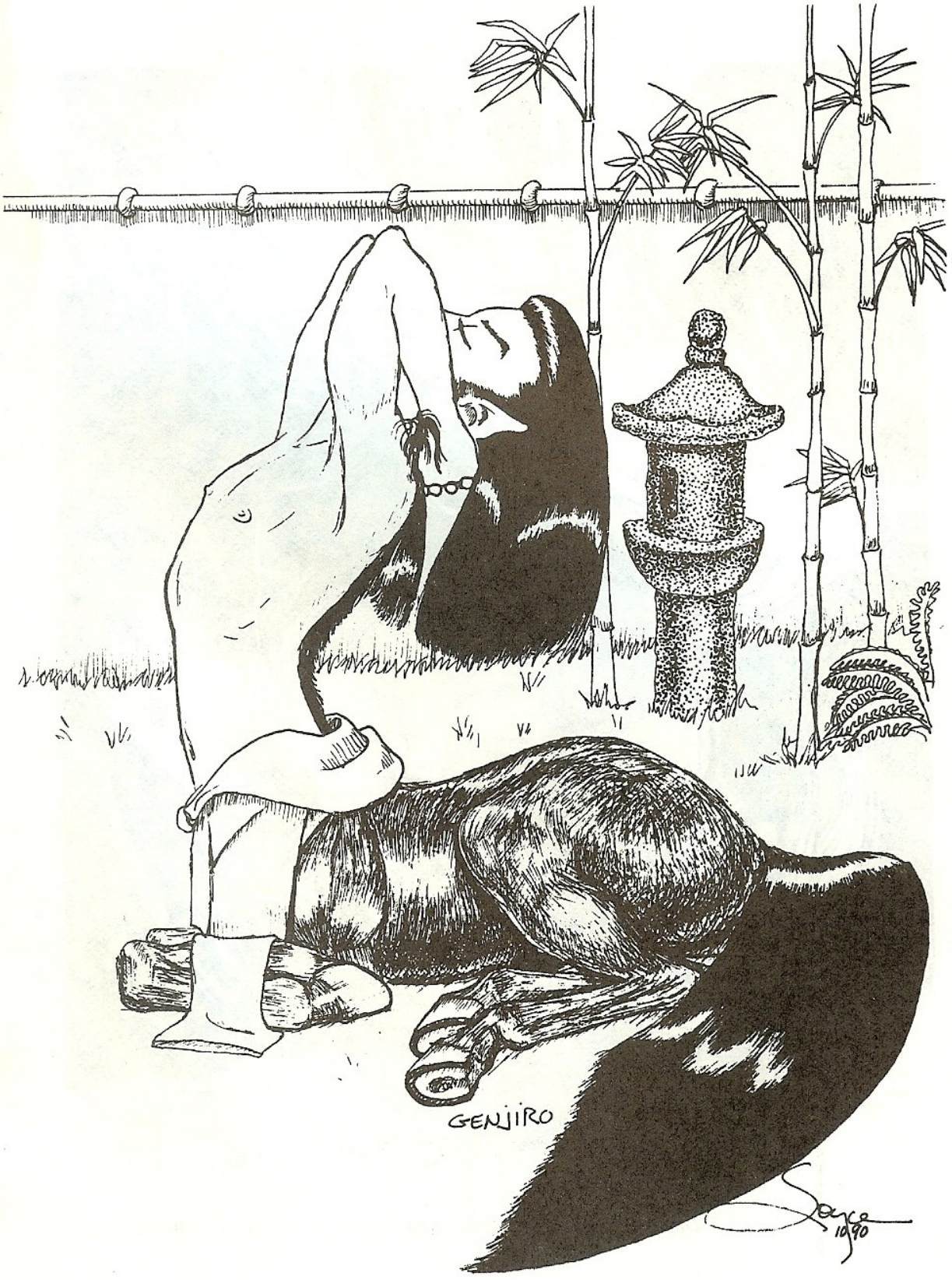
Joyce Norton—"Seems to me that the quality of the art in CG is getting much nicer these days. Are you just getting nicer stuff now, or could it be that the artists are feeling challenged to do more careful work since they know that they could have their piece published next to an artist's whose work they admire?"

Frank Gembeck—"A friend of mine, Tempest, came up with the T-shirt saying. Seeing Tom Howell's artwork inspired me to try stipple-shading Rand's skin. I think it worked out well...Getting ready for my last (hopefully) semester at Northern. Should graduate in May with a BFA *[he did -vw]*"

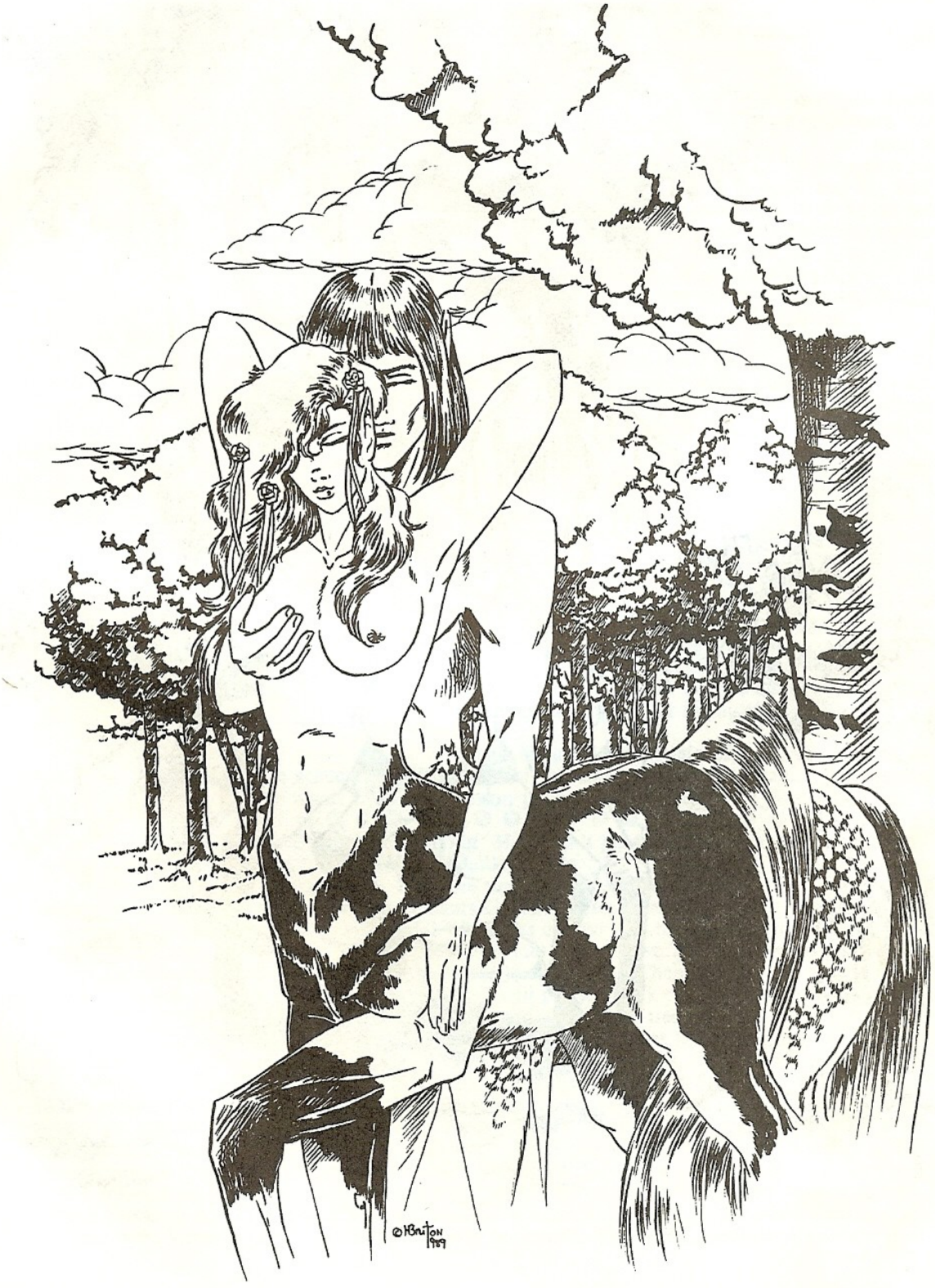
Frank Gembeck—"I am taking commissions. $25.00 B&W ink drawing and $35.00 color, 8½ by 11....I've done some erotica, not much, but I've done it. I'd have no problem taking on an erotic commission."

Did I mention Heather Bruton did the inks on this one? Mille Pardone!

Joyce Norton—"I'm going to be doing a graphic story for the APA I've joined, and it'll have Centaurs in it. It's Heather Bruton and Marg Baskin's *Sord and Sworcery*...they've already got a waitlist going."



Heather Bruton—"I'm still in bliss about not having to work. It looks like this is going to work out fine ... I adore painting full time, and I don't ever want to go back to working for someone!"

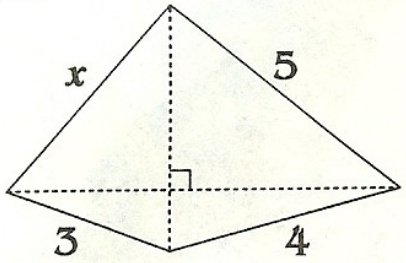


Paige Easley—"All of the campus is within walking distance. The city is beautiful and fairly safe during the day. Just don't wander around after dark alone. We are fairly laid back but hard working."

Editaurial--Puzzle Page

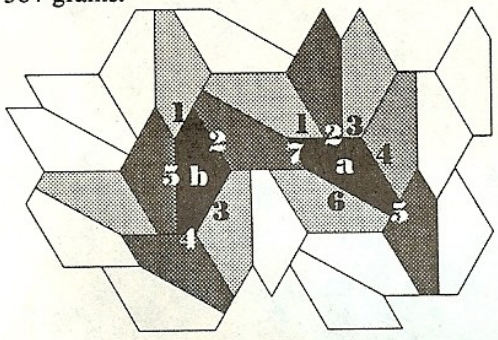
Greetings once again, folks. You may have noticed a rather different look to the Gatherum this time. If not, I'm not disappointed—I hoped only to do as well as Ed does, and not hope that not too many people are feeling the urge to bite my kneecaps. For anyone I offended, I apologize sincerely. I'm new at this, and if it'll make you feel better to write down *exactly* what you think my ancestry must have been, I love getting mail, and I may well agree with you.

Enough of the petty excuses. Those of you who thought that Ed's vacation meant you wouldn't be tortured with another of his brain-bending puzzles—you're outta luck! This is it:



As you see, we have a quadrilateral. This is a special sort of quadrilateral; If you connect its opposing corners, the intersection of the lines you draw (assuming you used a ruler, or a computer) is a right angle. I.e. its diagonals are perpendicular. Its sides are length 3, 4, 5, and x. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to figure out what x is. There is exactly one possible answer, no matter what sort of quadrilateral you draw, *as long as its diagonals are perpendicular*. What is the area of the figure thus formed? The answer you think is correct probably isn't. Extra credit if you find a general solution.

Last issue had two puzzles. I'll give the answers to the last one first: The mystery set of weights is 1,3,9,27, and 81 grams. To weigh 10 grams, the chemist puts the 9 and 1 on one side. To measure 20 grams, the 27 and 3 would go on one side, and the 1 and 9 on the other side. Get it?. To weigh 60 grams, he'd put the 81 and 9 on one side, and the 27 and 3 on the other. Two people solved this one. With one more weight, the next one in series, he could measure any weight up to 364 grams.



The other puzzle was a tiling problem. Alas, Ed tenders his profound apologies, but it doesn't work *quite* like he thought: This is how it actually comes out; Some of the tiles (the diagonal ones, such as [a]) touch 7 others, but others (the vertical ones [b]) touch only 5 others. If you spent a lot of futile hours solving this puzzle, write Ed and tell him just how many futile hours you spent on this--Ed loves to get mail, too. Despite the problem, one person got this right, and will be getting their fuzzy Elvis painting prize forthwith. (That's a joke) <---(closed captioned for the humor impaired)

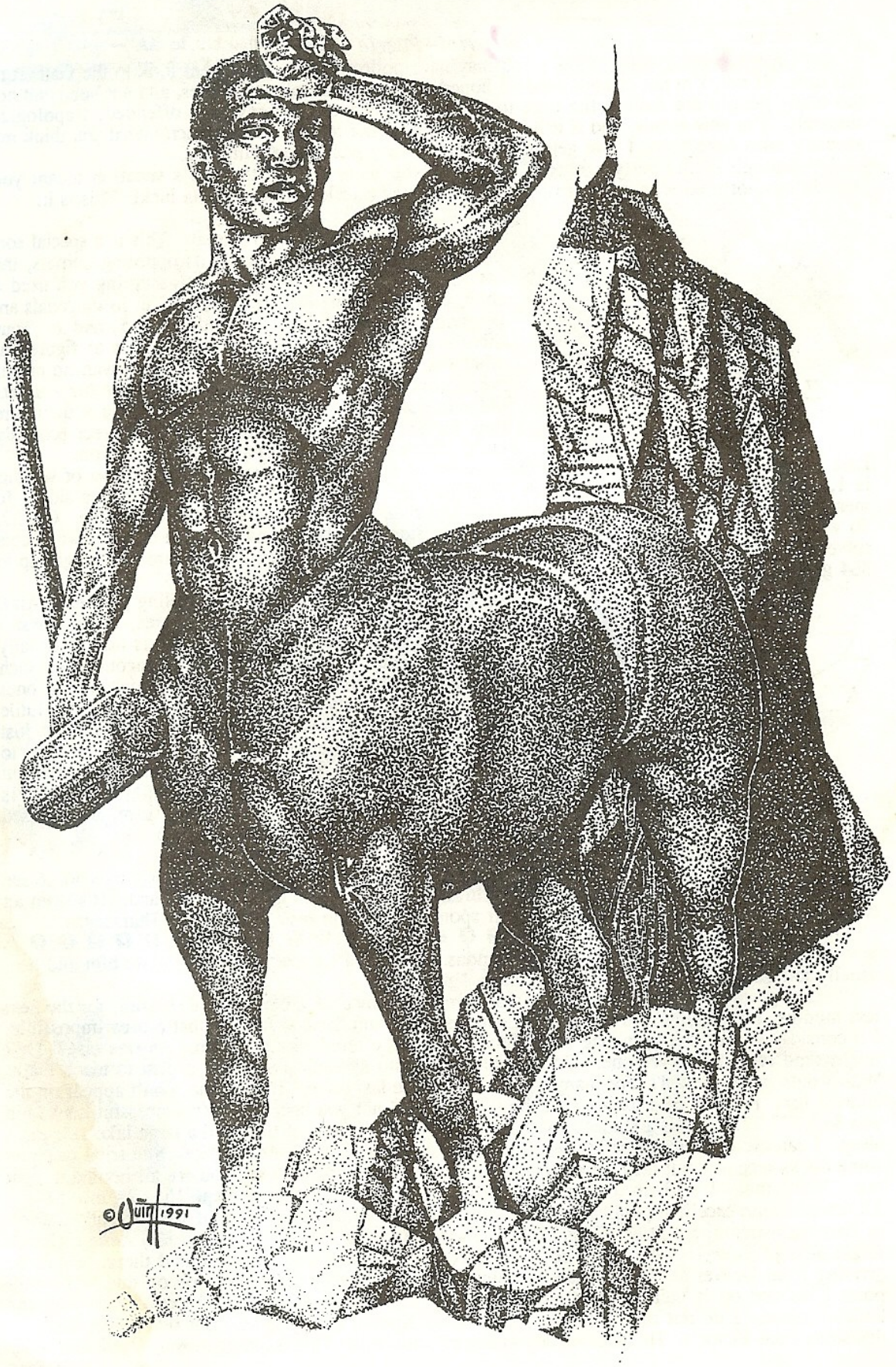
That's about all for me this issue. If you want to see what else I have to say, I've scattered it all through this book you have in your hand. It's been an experience. And now some words from our sponsor, pulled in over modem last Thursday:

☺ ☺

"An artist is a creature driven by demons. He doesn't know why they choose him and he's usually too busy to wonder why." --William Faulkner.

I'm going back to college soon. No more steady income. What do I do? Well, for the next few months, I am going to try to make Centaurs Gatherum break even. If that proves impossible, I'll consider giving it to someone else. Mel White has offered take the helm. Anyone else? Or I might send refunds to everyone. Or I might turn it into an exclusive APA. I plan to teach math. Who would have guessed? For many people, this is the last issue. Their names don't appear on the address list. For $15 or a usable art submission, I will put you back on. My successful house bid was $17,777.77. This is a student house. It has a yard with lots of trees and a large lake 100 yards away. I can cycle to any place in town within a half hour. Indy loves the lake. She tried catching some ducks recently, but they were moving 17 times faster than she was. You are all invited to visit me. Warn me. I will do a second X issue. Deadline for that is Sept 15. *Ironwood* and *XXXenophile* are excellent publications of this persuasion. More mainstream (if you can call Howarth or Barr mainstream) are *Stinz*, *Desert Peach*, *Those Annoying Post Brothers*, and *Keif Llama*. (Don't forget *Savage Henry*! -VW) I will be at Worldcon. Issue #26 will be distributed there. I will be arriving from Denver at 00:05 Friday morning. Victor probably did a good job on this. The only point I insisted on is that he put Parsonovich's "you promised to print this" explanation over the Saddam piece. I do not like Saddam. He violated Kjartan's copyrights. But other than that, the decisions were Victor's. He deserves any kudos or criticisms. This is *not* goodbye. Until next time.

—Ed Pegg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